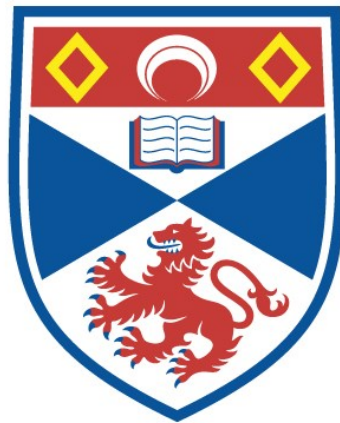


# **THE CONTRIBUTION OF THOMAS ERSKINE OF LINLATHEN AND HIS WRITINGS TO SCOTTISH THEOLOGY**

**James Charles Conn**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews**



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THE CONTRIBUTION OF THOMAS ERSKINE OF  
LINLATHEN AND HIS WRITINGS TO SCOTTISH  
THEOLOGY.

being a Thesis presented by

REV. JAMES CHARLES CONN. M.A., B.D.

to the University of St. Andrews  
in application for the degree of Ph.D.

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DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that the following Thesis is based on the results of study and research carried out by me, that the Thesis is my own composition, and that it has not previously been presented for a Higher Degree.

9 The Research was carried out in the Library of St. Andrew's University.

30<sup>th</sup> January 1935.

CERTIFICATE.

I certify that *Rev. James Charles Bonar*  
has spent nine terms at Research Work in *Theology*

that he has fulfilled the conditions of Ordinance No. 16  
( St.Andrews) and that he is qualified to submit the  
accompanying Thesis in application for the degree of Ph.D.



CAREER.

I graduated M.A. in 1909 and B.D. in 1912.

both in the University of Glasgow.

On the 1st. January 1932 I matriculated in the University of St. Andrews and commenced the Research on the work which is now being submitted as a Ph.D. Thesis.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THOMAS ERSKINE OF LINLATHEN  
AND HIS WRITINGS TO SCOTTISH THEOLOGY.

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The thesis will attempt to show that Erskine gave a fresh and powerful impulse to the theological and religious thought of Scotland in the 19th. century, and to assess its value. His thoughts are set forth not only in his books and writings, but also in his Letters and conversations with the leading religious thinkers of his day, and these will be considered and examined. The claim is not made that Erskine was a systematic theologian. His interest in theological questions was deep and sustained, and covered nearly the whole of his life; but he was a layman, without the expert training of the schools. In this respect his approach to theology stood to gain in freshness and originality, and to lose in definiteness and cohesion.

Our investigation will lead us, therefore, to consider Erskine, not as the founder of a school in Theology, nor as the builder of a theological structure of enduring character, but as a spring of spiritual and intellectual force and refreshment that flowed from his personality and writings to quicken and bear fruit in many directions.

When he began to write in the second decade of the century, Theology may be said to have been set in its ways

and fast bound by the dead hand of professional routine and traditionalism. For the people it had no living interest. It was a subject for the experts, technical and abstruse. It was a new thing for ordinary people to read of the love of God as real and true as the love of parent for child. Professor W.P. Paterson, in his inaugural address on ("The Position and prospects of Theology" 1903-pp.20) breathes his impatience at the stagnation of Scottish theology, and attributes this to the compact of allegiance to a statutory Confession, which seriously hampers if not proscribing any serious and trustworthy activity in this sphere. Had he been writing of Erskine's time his impatience must have been considerably greater. For Theology in Scotland was at a standstill; it was wedded to the phraseology and concepts of 200 years before, and by slavish adherence to old legal forms was seeking to solve the new and pressing problems of the 19th. century.

Erskine was a pioneer in breaking down this closed view and in opening up a new one. He revived and quickened interest in theological questions in Scotland, because he approached them thro. experience, applying the mind, heart, and conscience to their understanding and illumination. On every side he let in new light upon the sacred truth; he sought to open up the mind to new and higher views; he believed in the progressiveness of theology, that although the fundamentals of Christianity remained unchangeable, they were capable of being seen in a new and fresh light by every age. By his fresh

appeal to intuition, reason, common sense he was a powerful instrument in giving Scottish theology a new start along a richer and more diversified path.

Erskine's special theological views are important in themselves and worthy of investigation- as providing a changed emphasis and re-opening a road for others to travel, which had been closed for two centuries. But more important was the new spirit he brought to the investigation of Truth, arising from the depths of a rich inward communion with God. More than his actual teaching was the vital and saintly personality of the man- a sweet and diffusive influence for Christianity everywhere.

Such is the nature of the contribution which the thesis will attempt to show. It is the religious aspect of Theology, rather than the historical and ecclesiastical which will figure most. Erskine's interest in theological questions was fundamentally ethical and practical, and not metaphysical; and this side, he found, was receiving scant justice from the theologians of his day. It was to a fresh consideration of this important question- the bearing of salvation upon life- that he ever appealed. The inner strength of Erskine lay in the deep life which flowed in him from the Spirit; and without this, as he never ceases to urge, theological enquiry and religious profession are both in vain.

Thro. the spirit of the man and by the writings and letters to be considered, a fresh impetus was given to

theological reflection and progress in Scotland, from which can be traced quickened scholarship, and renewed and deepened interest among the people.

It is necessary to consider the religious background of Erskine's own life and times in Scotland; for his mind and influence can only be appreciated in the light of them.

At the close of the 18th. century the theological interest was at a very low ebb in Scotland. The influence of the negative and sceptical philosophy of Hume had withdrawn speculative interest from theological questions, but as the century drew to a close this influence was on the wane. Generally speaking the impulse of the Moderate party was not a bias in favour of Theology but towards culture and ecclesiastical politics. A striking weakness in the Church was that there was no comprehension of missionary duty and an entire absence of vision concerning the spiritual needs of the people.

New intellectual and spiritual forces were stirring at the beginning of the 19th. century. In almost every direction the human mind was beginning to open out and expand. The period saw the rise of a new and powerful influence in literature- in Sir Walter Scott and the spread of his writings, making for a larger intelligence and freer interpretation of the past and present. When Erskine was called to the bar in 1810, in the heyday of the Edinburgh Review, Scott, Cockburn, Jeffrey were brilliant and influential lights in Edinburgh society and his intimate friends. But the influence

of the intellectuals does not appear to have been favourable to Christianity. The trend was away from theology. Reid's philosophy of common sense appeared as a counter blast to Hume's scepticism: but being observational psychology it did not profoundly affect theology. However it was a force in the nation, says Cousin. ( McCosh- Scottish philosophy.) It led to theological professors dwelling on the relation between God's Word and the fundamental principles of human nature; to lay a deep and solid foundation for moral principle; to import a moral tone to the teaching in Divinity.

About the beginning of the century the Church witnessed a reviving interest in Evangelicalism. The Haldanes were making their influence felt in the founding of sunday schools, the distribution of tracts, and in spreading the gospel in many parts of the country. Under the leadership of Dr. Andrew Thomson the evangelical cause rose into definite ascendancy during the first two decades of the century. But this revival can scarcely be said to have had a literary or speculative side, its energies being chiefly directed to devotional and missionary activity. The followers of the school of Thomson contributed little to theological thought. During this period Thomson founded the Christian Instructor, which became the powerful organ of the rigid Calvinism identified with the Evangelicals. Dr. Chalmers, in a letter to Dr. Thomson in 1811 throws light upon the founding of this journal and the condition of Theology, as it appeared to him at that time. " I think a

magazine like yours peculiarly called for, as a barrier against the flippancy of the prevailing taste in Theology, which seems to have abandoned altogether the substance of Christianity and the authority of its peculiar doctrines." (Memoirs of Dr. Chalmers- <sup>Ed. 1849</sup> Vol. I p. 195)

Without entering into the question of the good and bad which mingled in both the <sup>two</sup> great parties of the Church- the Moderates and Evangelicals- it can be confidently affirmed that the awakening was a reaction against the latitudinarian <sup>in</sup> and inadequate doctrines being preached at the time, and resulted in a closer adherence to the old orthodoxy, with its legal technicalities. No fresh impulse was given to Theology proper and to the inner truths of our holy faith. In all other branches of knowledge there was a reaching forward, but in Theology ~~the~~ the view was backward. The ground was ready in the growing needs of men for something fresh in the theological outlook, and a new directive force. It was in Thomas Erskine that the times found a thinker who was profoundly to influence religious opinion in this country and others for the future.

A brief consideration must be given to some of the chief influences that helped to mould Erskine's thoughts. His earthly circumstances and temperament cannot be left out of account, for they were of such a nature as quite definitely to affect the tenor of his theological views. Being a ~~private~~ gentleman, with abundant means and friends, and not liable to be brought to the bar of any church for the opinions he held,

he was free and independent to follow his thoughts as few are. Again, his spiritual experience did not contain any crisis or mark of moral struggle, such as many have undergone, who were more exposed to the temptations and conflict of life due to their spirit and circumstances. Such freedom, in one direction, was a great advantage lending itself to independent thinking and expression, and to a robust individuality that characterised all his writing. At the same time it was a drawback, making his judgments sometimes not quite free from a touch of arbitrariness and one-sidedness, as we shall have occasion later to point out.

On both sides his spiritual inheritance was very rich. From the Erskine side there came the finest traditions in the Church and the Law. His grandfather was the famous jurist, who produced the Institutes of the Law of Scotland, a high authoritative work. Dr. John Erskine, his uncle, became the distinguished leader of the Evangelical party, whose spirituality, it is said, took the grimness out of his creed. His father, a W.S. in Edinburgh, bore an honoured name for his knowledge and integrity.

From the Grahams of Airth came his mother, who was the eldest daughter of a remarkable woman, in whom young Thomas, as a boy, saw a striking variation from his paternal ancestry and pondered it. She was an Episcopalian, with none of the Presbyterian austerity that marked the other line, but breathing the spirit of a deep and gentle piety. The mother of Thomas



inherited a large share of this spirit. From these sources Erskine derived the interest he maintained throughout his life in both Church communions, and the strong but gracious approach to the Christian faith which marked his life and writings. But he was a friend of all churches, of truly catholic sympathies, and numbered among his close intimates men and women of every denomination.

Of his great teachers Erskine owed most to the study of the Bible, and especially to the New Testament in its original tongue. He found in the writings of William Law a fount of help and inspiration; and he owed much to Plato for spiritual light and guidance.

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The beliefs of Erskine are set forth in the following principal works.

1. " Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of the Christian Religion." 1820.
  2. " An Essay on Faith." 1822.
  3. " The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel." 1828.
  4. " The Brazen Serpent." 1831.
  5. " The Doctrine of Election." 1837.
  6. " The Spiritual Order and other papers." 1871.
  7. " Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen" 2 Vols.  
(1800- 1870) edited by William Hanna D.D. 1877.
  8. Introductions to the following works- " The Rev. John Gambold, A.M." 1822.- " The Saint's Everlasting Rest" 1824., " The Letters of Samuel Rutherford." 1825.
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The treatment which it is proposed to adopt will be to examine and appreciate Erskine's leading and most influential ideas, as these are contained in his principal works and specially worked out in certain of them; with reference to the Letters as these may be found to develop or to modify his views. The attempt will be made to work out the following general scheme.

- I. A consideration of the general character and evidence of Religion, as embodied in "the Internal Evidence"

This work contains Erskine's leading religious principles and ideas upon Authority and Revelation, the Bible, and Miracle. His characteristic thoughts on Conscience considered from "the Doctrine of Election."

2. The Row Movement in its higher and lower reaches, and Erskine's association with McLeod Campbell and Edward Irving.
3. Erskine's more specifically Christian teaching, as set forth in the "Essay on Faith"; "the Unconditional Freeness"; and "the Brazen Serpent." He considers in them the essential character of the Gospel as a Revelation of Divine Love. Special attention will be given to the "Unconditional Freeness" as marking his definite break with Orthodox Calvinism.

These special beliefs will be considered under the sections- the Fatherhood of God- the doctrine of Predestination- ideas of Christ and the Atonement- Life in the Holy Spirit.

4. Christian Eschatology. Education and probation. Erskine's belief in the final restitution of all men: with special reference to "The Spiritual Order" and St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans.
5. Some reflections on Erskine's Universalism.

6. His influence, direct and indirect, upon the Theology of the various Churches in Scotland and leading religious thinkers of his time.

7. APPRECIATION and CRITICISM.

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## I.

The general character and evidence of Religion.

How are we to approach religious truth? How are we to derive the greatest good from it? These were two important questions which Erskine found pressing for answer. His earliest work- "Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the truth of Revealed Religion." attempts to furnish an answer. It professes humbly to present us with a theory upon which his Theology was to be accepted, but it touches on nearly the whole scheme which he later worked out. In reality it was an effort, substantially successful and required, to present Christianity to his generation as a religion which could stand the test of conscience and intelligence. The Christian faith, he was fully persuaded, if it were to capture men must commend itself to their heart and reason. " This work" says Principal Tulloch in his book-"Movements of Religious Thought" pp. 63, "is not only interesting in itself but specially interesting as marking a crisis in Erskine's own history, and what we may call a crisis in the Theological thought of Scotland." ( App. 1. )

Erskine for a time shared the prevailing scepticism of the literary and legal circles of Edinburgh in which he moved. Driven by a divine urge he felt constrained to define his position, to settle with himself where he stood, and if possible to obtain sure and firm ground for his feet.

His great necessity was to find a satisfying faith that would meet the whole needs, spiritual and intellectual, of his being. The Evangelical faith, in which his spirit was nurtured, came most nearly for a while in satisfying the deep religious cravings of his being. But as a religion to be preached and received by the people he found it lacking, not in <sup>a</sup> earnestness, but in rational presentation and in its appeal to the inner man. What was lacking and vitally needed was more of conscience and man's moral nature brought into religion.

This was his line of approach to religious questions—the new note introduced to the theology of his time, to be worked out in this earliest publication, and which pervaded all his writings and letters. Religion must prove itself reasonable, satisfying the heart, conscience, and intelligence and worthy of God and fitted to do for man the best and highest, before it can be received as Divine.

Writing 45 years later in the 'Spiritual Order: p. 82. he recalls the fact that this was the apprehension of Christianity which he required in the beginning. Nearly half a century of deepening experience had served to confirm it.

"I was brought up from my childhood in the belief of the supernatural and miraculous in connection with religion, especially in connection with the person and life and teaching of Jesus Christ, and like many in the present day I came, in after life, to have misgivings as to the credibility of this

44.  
wonderland history. But the patient study of the narrative and of its place in the history of the world, and the perception of a light in it which entirely satisfied my reason and conscience, finally overcame these misgivings and forced on me the conviction of its truth." This quotation is self revealing, as showing that Erskine passed thro. a critical period of doubt and emerged into an assured possession of faith not by an extraordinary visitation of light, but thro. the application of his mind and heart to the Revealed truth.

The main object of this work is to show that the truth of religion must be brought home to the conscience and reason, and that external evidence is quite insufficient to establish its testimony. The doctrine of Holy scripture must be shown to accord with the highest notions of the Supreme Being which we derive from other sources, and with the mass of moral facts which lie within us and around us. It must also be fitted to promote the highest in man. We must be able to examine whether Revelation be suitable to the nature of man and whether it is calculated to accomplish the object which it proposes.

Two principles, Erskine held, must be steadily kept before us and applied. (1) Religion must rest on a basis of experience: (2) it must be self-verifying, shining by its own light and finding an echo in the individual heart. This may be taken as Erskine's stepping-off ground. "If the actions" he says, ('Internal Evidence! p.22.) "ascribed to God by any

system of religion present a view of the divine character which is at variance with moral perfection, we have no reason to believe that they are really the actions of God. But if, on the contrary they have a strong and distinct tendency to elevate our notions of goodness and in harmony with them, we have reason to believe that they may be the actions of God."

There are three tests which Erskine imposes upon any religion:-

(1) Its conformity to man's moral constitution.

A system of religion which is opposed to these moral obligations is opposed to right reason. Any Revelation that purports to come to us from God must not vitiate the moral convictions which are first principles of all our reasonings.

(2) Its practical effect on the character of the believer.

Our affections are naturally called forth by suitable objects presented to them such as love, fear, hatred, hope; and so our characters are determined by the habitual direction of these affections. On analogy, if the actions attributed to God by any system of religion be really such objects, as when present to the mind, do not stir the affections at all, that religion cannot influence the character and is useless. If on the other hand, they can be shown to arouse feelings on behalf of goodness and righteousness and draw the current of our affections and wills towards these, then the argument is a strong one in favour of their truth.



(3) Adaptation to the actual circumstances of man's condition in the world.

*much but* The idea here is† that human life is made up of a great variety of circumstances, and passions, and events which sway the feelings in all directions. There is much moral evil and misery and suffering in the world, <sup>a</sup> And so, <sup>his</sup> a strong point in favour of religious truth is, when it can be shown to meet all these circumstances, keeping the balance even. e.g. offering pardon without lowering the standard of moral duty; or when its principles use all these varied experiences of life to bring out the best of character and to convert them into opportunities of growing in conformity to God and entering into happiness.

All these things reside in the Christian Revelation, Erskine maintained. When the principles and tests described, are applied searchingly to Christianity, the Gospel approves itself as stamped with the seal of Heaven. And he claimed for it† that supposing the Revelation never to have had a miraculous attestation, it is true in the nature of things, and comes to us compellingly authenticated by its own inherent moral power and loveliness. Further, he found in all other religions such palpable weaknesses when these tests are applied, and such a wide divergence from Christianity, that he was fully convinced that the Christian faith is the full and absolute Religion. It excels all inventions, discoveries, and works of men; and

without external testimony its inward appeal and influence is sufficient to attach our allegiance.

Erskine proceeds to examine the important question of Authority in religion, and such subjects as Natural and Revealed religion, miracle, creeds, the Bible, conscience.

A religion of mere authority coming from the outside, and compelling faith and obedience, he held, is unintelligible. It is not even of the nature of religion, which must be self-verifying, commending itself by its own light to the inward consciousness. In the ordinary affairs of life we are guided, he said, by certain intuitive principles, and from experience we are aware of the way of their operation. There are the principles of ambition, avarice, benevolence, and others. An ambitious man of talents will, we are sure, aim at some particular position of eminence and will form some scheme fitted for its attainment. Let us suppose the case of Julius Caesar: that an intimate friend of his had retired to some distant corner of the earth before the commencement of the political career of that wonderful man, and had received reliable information of his doings and circumstances, how would he have received it? He would most certainly have believed it, not only because he knew by experience of Caesar's ambition, but also because he could discern that every step of his progress, as set forth in the history, was admirably fitted to accomplish the ends of his ambition.

Further, in illustration, he submits that in the ordinary estimates of life we are led to judge the conduct of our friends when they are placed in certain circumstances, through our experience of them and the principles we have formed of their characters. <sup>For example,</sup> e.g. If we hear of our friend, in whose integrity we have the best of reasons for placing entire reliance, has committed a dishonourable action, we place our knowledge of our friend's character in opposition to the testimony of our informer and anxiously look for an explanation. Before being satisfied with the report we must be persuaded, either that his conduct though inconsistent is capable of an explanation, which does no violence to the principle formed of his character, or we abandon it for another. Such are examples of conviction based upon experience and understanding, and quite independent of our confidence in the narrator of the facts.

Applying these thoughts to religion, Erskine held, that there are certain fundamental principles of the Divine Being, His character and government, that we intuitively possess. God has surely given us in nature, providence, and man's moral constitution indications of His character and purpose to direct and instruct us in our relations to Himself and His creatures. These are fundamental and in the nature of things independent of any other testimony; and they are competent to judge the internal evidence of Christianity.

It is noteworthy that Dr. Thomas Chalmers ( whose

indebtedness to Erskine will be considered in Section vi.) objected strongly at one time to this line of argument. It is a forbidden road, he declared. We have neither power nor authority to reason upon it at all. (Evidences-pp. 11; chap. on internal evidence pp. 225.) But this position Chalmers abandoned for the one which Erskine had assumed. His later thoughts not only embody Erskine's standpoint; but the very words he uses are striking in their resemblance to Erskine's oft repeated language. " Every man who reads his Bible and compares what it says of mankind with the records of his own experience- every man who marks the adaptation of its mighty system of doctrine to his own spiritual need as a sinner in the sight of God, is furnished with practical proof of the Divine origin of our religion. I love this evidence. - - - It is what I call the portable evidence of Christianity. ( Memoirs of Dr. Chalmers- Vol. p. ? )

In the Remarks Erskine shows his ability to deal with the experiences of the inner life and his great intuitive power. He takes a different line from the famous analogy of Butler. The design in the Analogy was to answer objections against revealed religion by showing that its <sup>difficulties</sup> are similar to the difficulties in natural religion and Providence. Erskine's purpose was quite different. It was to establish the relation existing between the facts of natural religion and the doctrines of Christianity. " I mean to show" he says (Internal Evidence p. 20.) " that there is an intelligible and necessary connexion

between the doctrinal facts of Revelation and the character of God(as deduced from natural religion), in the same way as there is an intelligible and necessary connexion between the character of a man and his most characteristic actions."

This new method introduced by Erskine was not much in favour with those who built their faith on the authority and warrant of the miraculous in scripture. A thing was true not because they felt its truth, but because the Bible said it. At the same time, the Christian Instructor of the day welcomed Erskine's fresh and original views, emphasising the intrinsic excellence of Christianity and its powerful appeal to those 'natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought or understanding is able either to produce or prevent"; and it pointed out that "the preacher must show that a doctrine tends to promote the glory of God and the happiness of men: that it is worthy of and consistent with, the character of God from whom it comes. And unless he can bring this conviction home to the hearts of his hearers, the most decisive evidence he can give of its truth, will be of little avail." (Christian Instructor: Vol.22, 1823. Article on the insufficiency of External evidence of Christianity.)

" We have not often seen" the review concludes, " exhibited in a higher degree, that combination of intellectual power and moral sensibility, which is the best gift of God, and the richest possession of man."

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Erskine next considers the insufficiency of Natural religion. Though these great principles are true as far as they go, they do not go far enough. They are deficient in practical effect upon the human mind and heart. Natural theology fails, he held, where it is most needed. " It marks the distinctions of right and wrong; but does not sufficiently attach our love to what is right, nor our abhorrence to what is wrong.( Internal Evidence. p.52.) Its weakness is to be seen in a kind of indifference or despair which it induces. ' Under an impression of guilt, a man who has no other religious knowledge than that which unassisted reason affords, must feel much perplexity and embarrassment. He believes that God is gracious; but the wounds which he feels in his conscience, and the misery which he sees around him, demonstrate that God is of a most uncompromising Purity. He knows not what to think; and he is tempted either to despair, or to turn his thoughts away from so alarming a subject.' ( p.53.)

Some such scheme as the Christian Revelation contains, seems needful. It is necessary, Erskine concluded, in order that men should be drawn out of their sins and selfishness and brought back into sympathy with the Divine purpose; that God should make a more powerful appeal to the heart. The exceeding sinfulness of sin required to be more strikingly and unequivocally demonstrated and the principle of Love in God's heart brought more nearly and personally to man's need.

It is a striking and yet an undeniable fact, Erskine

declared, that we are comparatively little affected by abstract truths. In one of his memorable sentences, he says, ( p.63.) " The cry of a little child will produce a greater movement in almost any mind, than 20 pages of unanswerable reasoning." Now the principles of Natural Theology consist in abstract conclusions of the intellect, which make no powerful appeal to the heart. e.g. Abstract ideas of patriotism and integrity count for much less than the high spectacle of heroic worth as exhibited by the conduct of Regulus in the senate of his country.

Similarly, abstract views of the Divine character drawn from the observation of Nature, however true they may be, are in general visions of the intellect <sup>? rather</sup> than influential principles in the heart and conduct. Something more was needed Erskine insisted; for the manifestation of the Divine character in creation, providence, and in the testimony of conscience, had been in great measure disregarded and made ineffective by sin. God became man, and dwelt among us. And Erskine contended ~~that~~ the truth of that history of wondrous love can be apprehended by the light of the heart. It represents the Divine character as coming forth to save mankind, and is best calculated to regenerate their characters and to attach them to Himself in love, obedience, and loyalty.

Erskine is not interested in the speculative problem as to how the Incarnation was possible or how it actually took place. He is concerned not with its manner

but with its motive. Is it worthy of demonstration is the first and great question for him?

The Incarnation, he holds, does not declare a new principle in God. It has only assumed a more active and compelling attitude. He will not say that the Incarnation is an isolated event in the history of God's dealings with men; it is a development of the character of God of a highly influential kind showing the nature of His Fatherly relationship which had always existed, but which the reign of sin had destroyed. Love is no abstraction; it shows itself in loving, in entering conditions that are foreign to it, and coming into the midst of human life. That which we know in everyday experience lies at the root of our theology.

The doctrine of the Atonement is also considered, and its great excellence indicated, particularly with regard to the view it gives of God, and its influence on man. When he considers the design of the Atonement, as exhibiting the justice and mercy of God, to set forth the heart of God's eternal longing for His sinful children, and its power to attach them to Himself in righteousness and love, he is fully persuaded of its sublime efficacy.

But if Christianity be so admirably adapted to influence the heart, how comes it that it is so often inefficient? The answer Erskine gives to this perplexing question is that the mind is indisposed to attend to an argument that opposes any favourable inclination; and Christianity



Christianity is strenuously against the prevailing current of human desire and character. Men do not look very diligently for that which they would be sorry to find.

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## Authority in Religion.

Four authorities have offered themselves at different times for man's acceptance- the Church, the Bible, Reason, the Inner Light. In the reconciliation of the last two Erskine may be said to have found a sure ground for his faith.

In seeking for the true seat of authority in religion, he was led to examine the positions of his day with regard to the Church, the Bible, the Creeds. The idea of an infallible Book, he affirmed, was just the same kind of evil as an infallible Church. " There may be the most absolute belief in the infallibility of a Church or in the inspiration of the Bible, along with the most absolute unbelief in the doctrine taught by them, because the truth of the doctrine may be altogether undiscerned." ( The Spiritual Order: p. 91.) This passage clearly sets forth the standpoint which Erskine adopted. He believed with all his mind and heart that the Revelation, communicated thro. the scriptures, gave a knowledge of God and of His redeeming purpose which could not otherwise have come to us; but he is just as sure that the truth must be man's own insight and discovery before it can be to him a spiritual reality and possession. The scriptures were mighty in their appeal to the heart and conscience: but " we must approach the sacred narrative just like any other" ( Letters- Vol.2: p.167.) and investigate the truths which it professes to set forth, as these bear on the two great questions- are they worthy of God, and satis-

satisfactory to man's higher reason and moral nature?

Dictatorship in religion, vested in either a Church or a Book, ran counter to Erskine's whole conception of spiritual religion. It was not the divine method with man to ask for unenquiring submission, but to appeal to the highest within him as answering the deepest without. This was essentially Christ's method. He appealed to the spiritual in man. No one was asked to receive the truth from Him, blindly and submissively, or for any lower reason than because it found a response in his inmost heart and commended itself as true.

Seeking primarily an intelligent and appreciative understanding of Christianity in the light of all the moral and spiritual in his nature, Erskine found stumbling blocks in the exaltation of creeds and inerrant views of scripture. He did not attack the Church creeds, but he proceeded to show their weaknesses and inferiority as abstract statements of Christian truth. His chief objection to them was that they seemed to obscure the essential meaning of Christianity, by their loose unconnected statements of truths, which had no power to influence character. Historically, he pointed out, they were summaries originated by the introduction of doctrinal errors and metaphysical speculations into religion. The aim of making them was chiefly negative; and they were not so much intended to be repositories of truth, as barriers against the encroachment of erroneous opinions. The doctrines, he held, hang loosely together ' like links severed from the chain to which

they belonged.' Though logically connected up, they are not spiritually, because they are not vitally related to the one great object of the Bible viz<sup>y</sup> the regeneration of the human heart by the knowledge of the Divine character. The doctrine of the Trinity is taken as an illustration ( to be considered later under the Holy Spirit). But the point he makes is<sup>1</sup> that in the Bible, when the historical conditions are considered, which gave rise to the development of the conception, it is a wonderfully enriching idea of the Divine character and purpose. This is an example of the evils that spring from receiving impressions of religion exclusively or chiefly from this source.

#### The limits of the Bible's authority.

Inerrant authority Erskine regarded as impossible and undesirable. It could not be held without a tortuous dealing with the facts of the moral and spiritual life and fettering the human spirit. The fundamental principle of religion was freedom; its method was not force and domination, but persuasion thro. the heart, conscience, and understanding. To set up the scriptures as uniformly equal and authoritative was tantamount to denying the value of experience and a progressive Revelation. But Erskine firmly believed that Revelation was a divine process going on within man's religious nature and in

human history and experience. In the Bible that self-Revelation of God reached its supreme point of significance for mankind in the experience of the Hebrew prophets culminating in Jesus Christ. But there were different levels of inspiration, and the Bible must be studied and interpreted in the light of this principle, and as a whole. It is not meant by this, he says, that we are to approach scripture in the spirit of a judge. Far be it from that attitude; but true discipleship consists not in blind submission but in the discernment and love of the truth. Men were called by Christ to try what He taught them by a light within them; and surely we are bound to try by the same light the truths that come to us from the revealed word. The truths which are revealed in the Bible, he considered, are truths which the human mind could never have arrived at, but when they are revealed to us, they must carry conviction with them by their correspondence with the rest of our experience. We can only be assured of their trustworthiness by an inward revelation corresponding to the outward.

#### The miraculous element in belief.

Erskine's teaching is marked by a fresh and vital use of the Bible. He tells us he was brought up to believe that the Divinity of the Christian Revelation was vouched for by its miraculous and supernatural attestation; but " many persons

never get farther than the miracles which were wrought in confirmation of its divine authority. Those who reject them are called infidels, and those who admit them are called believers; and yet, after all, there may be very little difference between them. A belief in the miracles does not constitute the faith of a Christian. These miracles attest the authority of the messenger: they are not themselves the message ( Internal evidence- p. 183.) Between these thoughts and his last thoughts, gathered into the Spiritual Order, there is a whole life-time of experience; and yet there is little change in the belief; for in the Spiritual Order-(p.93.) he says:- " The assurance of the Bible's inspiration in the sense of verbal infallibility( in which sense the word is most generally used) is not necessary and would even be prejudicial were it to become the ground of my faith and so to stand between me and the actual personal discernment of its truth."

From these and many other passages, it is clear that Erskine regarded the evidential value of the miracles as very small, for bringing home the conviction to the heart of the truth of Christianity. Too great importance had been attached to this kind of proof was his judgment. The spiritual quality of the Revelation was to him the guarantee of its divine origin. In the Doctrine of Election-(p. 178.) he finely says:- ' I may believe all miracles, without faith: for I may believe them without meeting God in my heart.'

In his conversations with Miss Wedgwood, preserved

in her valuable journal, and printed in Vol.2 of Erskine's Letters, also contained the best expression of some of his later and riper thought. Referring to the critical spirit towards the Bible (Letters-Vol.2, pp.161) he says:- " I think we shall learn to value the Bible more as we grow independent of it. I do value parts of the Bible exceedingly, but I do not feel dependent on it. There are discrepancies in the narrative which are very definite and striking; neither can I ignore them, and I feel that this is not inspiration. The records are the vehicles of principles, which are true independently of the records, and which criticism cannot touch. Further on, on the same theme, he says- ' I have no difficulty in receiving the fact of miracle. But if any one has, I do not conceive that he is thereby debarred from entering into the spirit of Christianity. The one is a fact: the other is a principle. The two can never come into collision with each other.'

In these views Erskine disclaims any intention of detracting from the true authority of the Inspired book; his object is simply to put it in its true place. The idea of organic development was not acceptable to his times: it was thought to derogate from the claims of Christianity to be a religion of divine or supernatural origin and to weaken the miraculous glory of its revelation. Erskine asserted the principle, now generally accepted, that recognises a true spiritual basis in man's nature, and looks upon revelation in

a broader sense. Calvin himself was unwilling to regard the Bible as a merely external authority. "The full conviction with which we ought to receive" scripture is due to "the testimony of the Holy Spirit" (Institutes I, 8, 5.). Erskine's whole object was to vindicate this great truth, and to save the Christian religion from an undue subservience to the written word. He believed it was no real service to the supernatural to disconnect it as much as possible from the natural and human. The divine power of Christianity is shown in this- that its truths have found a response in man's spiritual intelligence, and moulded the highest life in mankind. There is a Divine Spirit working in us or as Erskine calls it a living original- working thro. living experiences of various kinds, and enabling us to understand better the outward manifestation. His last word on the value of the Bible is to be found in these words:- "It reveals to me the Living God. I know its truth, because I have been able to verify its exposition of God from what I have myself found in Him." (Spiritual Order, p.93.) It is interesting to set these words side by side with the famous words spoken by Dr. W. Robertson Smith a few years later, in his answer to the Form of Libel, quoted (Expositor, IV, x, p.250). "And this record I know to be true by the witness of His Spirit in my heart whereby I am assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul."



### Conscience.

The living original of God in man's spirit Erskine called conscience. It is one of the leading ideas contained in his teaching. The ' Doctrine of Election' is mainly occupied with it. And in his other writings and letters it is constantly coming into prominence.

Erskine's thoughts on conscience rest upon the belief that we first penetrate into the essence of religion in our personal intercourse with God. All genuine religion and living faith in God are characterised by inwardness, by the action of the Spirit of God bearing directly on our spirits. " Persons professing Christianity" he says (Doctrine of Election, pp.67.) often speak of the natural conscience, as they call it, disrespectfully, and yet all the true Christianity that ever finds a place in man's heart must enter thro. that door. That is the point of connection between God and man, the place of meeting,- there it is where man either receives, or rejects Him."

The Bible is a telescope revealing God to us, but it is the eye that sees and uses it. If there were not something akin to the sun in us we could never behold the sun. Faith is our seeing the Gracious Father revealed in ~~Our~~ Christ thro, the historical record and responding to that intention of goodwill and redemption. But it is God who enables us to see, for He reveals Himself in the heart and

conscience. If there is no inner bond between human nature and the Divine, it is difficult to see how they can ever be brought together.

This innate connection may be expressed and explained in various ways. Erskine descended into the depths of the soul and his own spiritual experience, seeking an answer to the questions, whence does the conscience come; is its source human or divine; does it belong to ourselves or is it implanted by God?

The Bible assumes that we have some innate original capacity for apprehending spiritual truths when revealed, and to this capacity it addresses itself that we may find God and know Him for ourselves. The reality of the spiritual world is more real than the physical which the senses apprehend. In a letter to Miss Wedgwood, (Vol 2, p. 156) he says:- "Is my inner sense, my conscience, less to be trusted than my outward senses? Have I firmer reason to believe in an outward world than in an inward? I think not. I believe in the reality of goodness and rightness, at least as much as I do in the reality of earth and water. I am sure that if all hearts were filled with righteous love, all the present confusion and misery would disappear from the earth, I see a preparation for this result in the capacity of love as part of our organisation."

Erskine employed the analogy between the outward and inner world of the spirit with powerful effect. The world of the spirit, he said, which is illuminated by \_\_\_\_\_

by conscience, is <sup>more</sup> much profoundly vouched for than the other of touch and sight. The love, beauty, and order it contained an assurance that in the higher region of the spiritual there must be a principle unifying all experience. The invisible world appeared to him to be the subject of laws just as open to investigation and far more permanent than those by which the outward universe is governed, those laws being the object of revelation in the heart, and the scriptures being their illustration. Miss Wedgwood records further on in her journal-(p165: Vol.2. Letters.) that Erskine frequently spoke of the force of gravitation, and found it as a parable of the influence of love, keeping everything together in its right place. No human being is without lucid intervals in which he would allow that the only good thing in life is love, and that every drop of sweetness comes from this. Christianity is the revelation of the Fountain-head of all these scattered drops. Every man was visited with a ray of light streaming from the great fountain of light. Conscience was that ray of light, and it came straight from Christ. This revelation of Christ in the heart is a universal experience. Men have never been without this inward witness that testifies to the divine righteousness, working with them and against them when they disobeyed his voice. We must not put out of court, he said, as it had been done in the 18th. and 19th. century this reliable witness to the things of the spirit. It was God's primal revelation to the heart, God authenticating Himself in living

experience. And to Erskine it followed, that if Christ was Divine, as the Church believed and thought, His revelation could not be purely historical and static, but must be given to and thro. the Christ-like element in man's consciousness. He identified the conscience with the Indwelling Christ, the Logos- the great life-principle, whose voice had been sounding always within the soul of man, sometimes loudly, sometimes feebly, but never altogether unheard. " The Divine nature- the living Spirit or Word has been communicated to all subjectively as a capacity for embracing God." (Election, p. 61.) When we see rightly the gift of Christ, we shall see that He is the true light that lighteth every man, so also there is a communication of life to every man. This ' Inner Light' is the great organ of theology. Only that which commends itself to his conscience, which he feels to be true, and right, and good can a man believe.

Faith, he believed, has always reference to that Inward or Living Word, which from moment to moment is speaking to us, and to that which receives its witness, distinguishing it from all other voices, whether from without or within: and resting on it as the Living Word of the Almighty Faithful God.

Our Lord's parables of the Sower and the Treasure, Erskine felt, carried this significance. ' He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man.' It is not a preacher that sows it: it is not a man instructing another: and it is not a book though that book be the Bible/

Bible: but it is the Son of Man Himself within the heart. The seed is sown everywhere; it is the seed of the Kingdom; and wherever a heart recognises its authority, and submits to its entire guidance, the reign of self <sup>having</sup> ~~will~~ be ceased and the reign of God's will has commenced there- and this is the Kingdom within.

St. Paul also, he held, sets this truth clearly in his teaching. The Apostle preached redemption from sin and death, thro. a dying to the flesh, consented to, in filial dependence on the fatherly love of God: declaring at the same time, that his doctrine could have no effectual witness or proper basis, but the light of God in the conscience- the true witness of the Spirit. "The instruction may and does come from without both in morals and religion; but that authority that seals it is within,- the inward spiritual consciousness, which constitutes the life in religion as well as in morality."  
( Doctrine of Election, p. 52I.)

The authority of conscience, however, he points out, is strictly within the spiritual sphere. It witnesses not to intellectual, but to moral and religious truth. It will not help, e.g., to interpret a doubtful passage of scripture or to solve a disputed point of Church usage or history. But what is more essential to life- the man of a right spiritual mind will have sympathy with and apprehension of truth far exceeding in importance the mere intellectual understanding of it.

The objection to this treatment of conscience, it

is anticipated by Erskine will be that it makes every man the measure of truth. The answer is— I am not contending for the right of private judgment, but for the right of conscience. It has its own inalienable rights as a pervading element in the history of man's soul in the face of revelation, and especially in face of the dogmas which have been based on Revelation.

There is a striking passage in Principal Shairp's Reminiscences of Erskine ( Vol.2, p.355. Letters.) in which Erskine seeks to answer this objection and to show that the light of conscience can never be cut off from its source and set itself up as an independent authority. " Conscience is not mine, I am conscience's. Each man does not possess it but is possessed of it. It speaks in virtue of a higher light than itself, of which it declares itself to be but a ray. It swells outward to Christ and finds its fulness only in Him and God. It is their continual witness, referring back not to itself but to Them."

Prevalent misapprehensions of conscience are next considered. It is true and authoritative; but it is not infallible. Conscience grows and becomes enlightened as it attends to the message presented to it; it may also become weak and feeble with neglect. But to declare its authority is not to reduce Christianity to a voice or mere intimation of right and wrong. Rightly understood it directs us to its higher source. We ought to rise thro. conscience to God the Father and into acquaintance with Him, who speaks in that voice. It is the channel of God's

personal and intimate communication to men. And Erskine did not hesitate to say that it was Christ standing at the door of the heart and inviting us by faith and surrender to enter into fuller and richer intimacy which is discoverable in the Father's love, revealed in His life, death, and resurrection. As such it is not a mere impression but a communication and participation. However, supremely important as conscience is, it is not enough, Erskine firmly believed. Life finds itself totally unable to meet the demands of conscience, and it is frustrated by sin and self will. Beyond it there is required the knowledge of the Person of Jesus Christ which comes to us only thro. the New Testament.

How does Erskine meet another objection that conscience is a mere faculty of our nature like benevolence or compassion, and even when we follow it it does not lead to an assurance of the reality of God? He can only answer that to him it is of a different order from the other feelings of his mind: because he knows in his heart, that however weakly it sounds, its character is peremptory and he is greatly sinning against the light if he neglects its divine authority.

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Principal Tulloch called Erskine the Apostle of the Christian consciousness in Scotland. In the foregoing thoughts he rendered a real service to Theology by showing that religion, and especially Christianity had a real root in man's nature and by insisting on its experiential power in the heart.

Scottish theology had lost this living note of reality because it had become scholastic again and divorced from religious experience. In theory it was doubtless accepted, but the theologians of the Church were not applying it to their theology. It had become bound up with dogmas, definitions, and intellectual descriptions of God which very inadequately filled the place of actual fellowship with the divine life. Erskine put his finger on this crucial weakness and restored experience to its rightful place. He was right to assert that religion is fundamentally the touch of the Living God upon the human spirit. It begins not in proving God, but in identifying Him with man's highest thoughts and deepest experiences; in feeling and knowing His living touch as a transforming power in our lives.

He perceived a grave danger to the spirit of religion by the improper exercise of authority. There had been a very imperfect apprehension of the rights of reason and conscience in our Theology. The Paley school had sought to establish the truth of Christianity irrespective of its relation to the spiritual consciousness and even to exhibit its divine origin in defiance of the consciousness regarding it. This was fatal, as Erskine declared. Religion must be as real as light if it is to be a practical and determining influence in man's life; and the glory of the gospel cannot be thought of worthily, unless it can be found to unite itself intimately with all that is profound and ineradicable in our nature. If religion is made for us, we are also made for it; and its truth



is addressed to the spiritual faculties with which we have been endowed.

Erskine is speaking with a different accent from the theology of his day. He is penetrating beneath the outward husks of facts to something deeper- to the meaning behind Christianity. No doubt his own intuitive consciousness of God and his direct contact with the spiritual world, led him to assert its existence in others, far beyond the facts; and he was therefore too little alive to the dangers of the purely subjective. In his eagerness to commend the divine immanence he sometimes pushed too far the attempt to break down the hard and fast distinction between the natural and the supernatural; and at times he uses words that are dangerously near discount-  
minimising ing the great objective facts of the gospel. But he did not minimise the historic Jesus: if so, it was to exalt Him far above the Jesus of history into the Eternal Christ, with cosmic and universal significance. Christ is a fact of the heart and conscience, as well as of history. No historical testimony by others can bring conviction to the heart, nor take the place of vision or insight to recognise the intrinsic glory of Jesus Christ. If there is no consciousness of need and separation from God and yearning after good, then we cannot recognise Christ and the significance of His revelation.

It was undoubtedly a weakness in Erskine that he failed sufficiently to perceive that the insight by which we recognise the truth and glory of Christianity is developed

by the Church and the witness of the generations. Here it was he failed to do justice to tradition and authority. For the knowledge of God is not something we attain by purely personal intuition but thro. the accumulated experience of what others have felt in Him.

As a profound Christian psychologist, Erskine was far ahead of the thinkers of his time. While they were satisfied to accept dogmas and statements about truth, he was digging extensively about the roots and origins of conscience, and revealing man's spiritual possessions. Against all attempts to explain it away as mere personal whim, social pressure, traditional force, or to ignore its presence in man's spirit, Erskine's words were, and still are, a bulwark of strength. True they are sometimes confused and lacking in definiteness. He was conscious of this himself: for in issuing a new edition of the Doctrine of Election he says in the preface, ( p.x 4II.) " In looking over the book I see I have not kept to the same meaning of the word conscience, and that I have used it sometimes to signify the spirit of God in man, and sometimes to signify the man's own apprehension of the Spirit in him, which is often a very different thing. The context however, though a fault, shows which of these senses is intended." Nevertheless Erskine's service was a great one to theology. He reinvested conscience with divine authority, and brought it back into the foreground, establish-

establishing it as the most ennobling truth of our experience- the response of the inner personality to the influence of the Spirit of God.

In his method Erskine was essentially scientific, seeking to build on fundamental principles. By insisting on these, as embodied in the heart of man and by seeking to ground Christian faith on a broad basis of truth, he stimulated a more scientific attitude in Theology, by which it might gain a higher respect from the other great branches of human thought. Moreover, he put a strong weapon into the hand of Theology by which to meet the attacks of criticism and science. For it can be confidently maintained that the facts of man's moral and spiritual consciousness are equally valid with any facts of natural science, and even more surely vouched for. Again, though there was a strong mystical strain in him, of the best kind, he had an intellectual urge that sent him in search of a great unifying principle that would gather up and explain the whole facts of man's moral and spiritual life and history- which he found in the Divine Being, whose character and purpose of love from all eternity, had been drawing nearer to men and whose witness was in their deepest experiences.

Religion to Erskine was so real and first hand, as it must ever be at its best, that he was rather impatient with difficulties of text and history (and not <sup>than</sup> enough) alive to their importance. But he could never disassociate it from an

immediate touch of God upon the heart, will, and character of man. All his teaching was directed to enforce this lesson; and the need for it was apparent in the eagerness with which men turned to embrace the vital message which he delivered. It braced and strengthened the faith of the faithful, and many turned with new interest to appreciate the saving power of Christianity, brought near and made accessible to their needs and hearts, by this new emphasis.

IIThe Row Controversy.

The year 1828 is a notable one in Erskine's life and in the religious history of Scotland. It marks the publication of his most influential work-'The unconditional Freeness of the Gospel,'and opens up the most significant period of his career. For years he had been occupied with thoughts about religion, and the broad principles upon which he could ground his faith. But for half a dozen years,since he published the Essay on Faith, he had turned quite definitely to consider the central teaching of Christianity.

It was at this time, that he came into real collision with the orthodox teaching and became fully aware how far he was removed from the Calvinism of his day. Quite definitely he now declares himself unable to move in the old circle of covenanting ideas, and sets himself in opposition to the restriction of Christ's Atoning sacrifice. Much controversy in the land was stirred by the thoughts embodied in this work, and for the first time the Church ceased to approve and launched an attack upon Erskine's heretical views. At this time the Evangelical interest had risen into complete ascendancy thro. the vigorous and systematic mind of Dr. Andrew Thomson; and the Christian Instructor had been founded as the organ of Calvinistic theology, exercising a powerful influence in the Church. At the same time the sincere and courageous convictions to which Erskine had given utterance

deeply impressed some higher minds, which were destined to exercise a marked influence upon the religious thoughts of their time. Notably amongst these were Dr. Chalmers and Maurice about whom more will be said in a later section. Dr. Chalmers (Hanna, Letters; Vol. I p. 127.) is said to have cordially approved of 'the leading principles of the Freeness of the Gospel' though dissenting from 'one of its positions', and to have said it was one of the most delightful books ever written.

The same year also witnessed an event of great importance to Erskine and Scottish theology. It is known as the Row Movement and was the special theological interest of the time. About the time when Erskine published his book and his mind was stirred with the importance of the thoughts contained in it, he met McLeod Campbell of Row for the first time: and a life friendship was formed, a community of views established of profound significance to both and to the theological outlook of Scotland.

Our interest in the Row Movement is strictly confined to Erskine's share in it and to its effect on the development of his thoughts. It has been held that Erskine founded a school by his teaching, of whom Maurice was an offshoot and McLeod Campbell the chief theological representative in Scotland. We do not think that Erskine's teaching was systematic enough for that, but he certainly inspired them and others, whose thoughts were moving in parallel lines, to work out the

the freer and larger conceptions of Christian truth which he had won for himself. In Dr. Campbell's preaching Erskine found for the first time the true conception of the gospel as he had been led to understand it. On the other hand the younger man welcomed the conclusions at which the saintly mind of Erskine had already arrived, as confirming the trend of his own views. They mutually strengthened each other in their higher views of the Love of God.

The Row Movement had two distinct manifestations which have often been confounded: but in reality they were almost entirely independent. The one was a new doctrine of the universality of God's love taught in Row by McLeod Campbell-a spiritual movement of the first order- which left behind it far reaching and permanent results in Scottish theology. The other took place at Port Glasgow, in connection with a claim to the revival of Miracles and Pentecostal gifts amongst certain simple people. It was of the sensational order and theologically barren. With both these religious manifestations Erskine came to be identified.

He vigorously supported and befriended Campbell thro. the subsequent trials to which he was subjected in the Church courts; and when his deposition came, he pronounced the Church guilty of a grievous wrong to one of her saintliest sons. ( App. 71 ) Though of independent mind, Campbell's teaching was in entire unison with all Erskine had expressed

in his writings. He has declared his love and obligations to Erskine in numberless letters contained in his Memoirs. This deep affection was signally marked when he called his son by the name ' Thomas Erskine '. It is beyond doubt that perhaps the greatest penetrative mind in Scottish theology of the century acknowledged and owed much to Erskine; and that he found the germ of his monumental work on the ' Nature of the Atonement ' in the suggestive writings and heart to heart talks of the saint of Linlathen.

The other Row manifestation reveals Erskine in his weakness, though it throws a wonderful sidelight upon the sterling honesty of a mind that could frankly own up to a mistake. The pretended miracles at Port Glasgow and the revival of the gift of tongues and prophesy created much excitement at the time, though it has now only an antiquarian interest. Erskine flung himself into it with characteristic ardour being associated with Edward Irving and Prof. Scott of Manchester. At first he was deeply impressed with the genuineness of the revelations, and declared these miraculous signs to be the manifestation of the true voice of the Living God in the land after centuries of silence, and the portents of an approaching crisis. After some years, however, he lost belief in them and in the Irvingite Church to which they gave birth; and he frankly disavowed them in his book on Election in the Appendix. " Since writing the above I have come to think differently; and I now do not believe the manifestations to be



of the same kind as those in the New Testament." In the Doctrine of Election, (p.572.) he says- " I am clearing my conscience, which requires me thus publicly to withdraw a testimony which I had publicly given, when I no longer believe it myself." He also characteristically adds- ' my doubts have not arisen from any discovery or suspicion of imposture in the individuals concerned; for I can bear testimony that I have not often in the course of my life met with men more marked by native simplicity and truth of character, as well as by godliness, than James and George McDonald.'

The letters to Lady Elgin and Miss Rachael Erskine from(1830-35, Vol.I. pp.175.) show how he gradually became emancipated from this phase, and came once more into the clear light of the gospel; holding to its purpose not to evoke excitement but to change life and character. ( App.iii)

In the final issue, this experience was salutary for Erskine. He, unlike Irving, emerged from this testing time, not broken but enlarged; holding the substance of the faith as before, but seeing more light all around him, and rising into a clearer and broader atmosphere. Gradually he freed himself from the dogmatism, which he and Campbell shared with their theological opponents; and his central thought of the all prevailing love of God in Christ became each year less dogmatic, more simple, real, and vital- the one message for humanity.

Under the immediate influence of this disturbing experience, Erskine produced a tract on 'the Gifts of the Spirit' 1830, and in the same year "The Brazen Serpent" or life coming thro. death. In the latter work he states at length the scriptural grounds upon which he believed the continuance of the miraculous gifts of tongues and healing was assured to the Church; and he concludes that had the faith of the Church continued pure and free these gifts of the Spirit would never have disappeared. The world dislikes the recurrence of miracles. And yet the evidence is overwhelming that miracles have recurred

Many highly mystical and speculative views on doctrine are advanced in these pages which are of little value to day. There are others, however, bearing on the moral conception of the Atonement most suggestive, as showing different aspects of it and which have been fruitful seeds in the later development among theologians, especially Maurice. These will claim our attention in the section assigned to the doctrine. But on the whole, the thoughts that emerged from this period are not of the high quality and value of the other writings. They reflect traces of the anxiety of mind thro. which he had passed.

III.The Fatherhood of God.

The basis of Erskine's teaching was the Divine Fatherhood. There is some deep principle in our nature, he said, that craves for this ~~this~~ filial sense of God- with all that it implies of ~~the~~ Divine Fatherliness and succour available for our deepest needs and power to draw the estranged heart of man from evil to good. The best and purest of men in all ages have sought to bring human life and conduct into harmony with that law of God or goodness or conscience, discernible in varying degrees among all men. But though conscience is authoritative enough, it is without the power thro, the separating influence of sin to effect this reconciliation and to bring about this harmony.

The power could only come by a convincing demonstration which Christ brought to the world, that God was not opposed to man despite his sins, but was altogether loving in His nature and purpose, and essentially Fatherhood. " I believe that the Fatherly relation and purpose of God towards men is the fundamental Revelation of Christianity. It is necessary as the only sufficient ground of that absolute trust that lies at the root of the Christian character: and I believe that it is only in the history of Jesus, taken in conjunction with His supernatural claims, that this self sacrificing love is fully declared." ( Spiritual Order- p.32.) The thought of the Father and the degree in which the full content of the name

is known and experienced, determined for Erskine the depth of reality we are able to express in all the doctrines and truths of life and destiny.

At the heart of the Divine Fatherhood is God's Holy and Righteous Will for all His children, and the spiritual order ~~of~~ truth and love in which all moral values are tested and known. Salvation is just finding this true order and living in it, making God the centre and ceasing from self: and saving faith is just the full acceptance of the divine wisdom and complete trust in the eternal purpose of good, amid all the darkness of life. Jesus put everything into one word Father and it contains the whole gospel. " He came to draw and guide the hearts of the children to their Father by revealing the Fatherliness of the Father's Heart, and He did this by His own unfaltering trust." (Spiritual Order; p.247.) This was the good news that came into the world by Christ- the Revelation of the Father. The aim of the gospel is summed up in this- to develop in the heart and conscience of men the spirit of filial trust and love towards God.

The conception of God's Fatherhood, it is held, was not a new thing in the world. The idea was present in most of the ethnic religions and is implied in the O.T. scriptures; yet it is clear that even the Jewish people regarded God rather as a Sovereign- a Law giver and Judge. The aim of Jesus was not an entirely new thing but it was to make this conception of God central and determinative for faith and life.

It must be confessed, Erskine held, that the sense of God to which the reason and conscience testify is unable to restrain the selfishness of the human heart and to bind it to the highest and the best. It must be supplemented by something which will give it passion and power viz:- the discovery of the inmost Heart of God's Fatherly Love disclosed in an actual life, and with a new intensity and wonder. "I cannot" he says, in the Spiritual Order p.17. "by any effort love those who are hateful and despicable, although I may control every expression of dislike. I cannot make myself humble in heart. I cannot cast out the spirit of covetousness and vanity. I may see it would be right and most desirable to do so; but I can no more order love to order than I can command midnight to become midday."

Jesus Christ as the Revealer of the Father is the centre of the spiritual world; and love is the principle of it. Man's true life is to be found in his right attitude and connection to both. Anyone who apprehends the superiority of the spiritual over the material is prepared to believe that the natural laws which reign in the world of matter, such as gravitation, electricity, and chemical affinities, belong to a lower order; and that underlying and overruling these are the true Eternal laws, which can be nothing else than God's own mind and character- His wisdom, love, and righteousness.

Erskine illuminated his thought by one of his

apposite illustrations from science. Suppose, he says, a planet gifted with intelligence and volition, on the strength of this gift emancipating itself from the law of gravitation: it would soon find that all its sweet order and harmony were gone, and its independent efforts to perform its revolutions would not do the work of a centre of gravity. Its completeness consists in the maintenance of its relation to this centre, without which all goes wrong. Trust in God the Father is man's true centre; everything in life goes wrong when man sets up his own will and desires and ambitions as independent authorities and refuses the influences that are communicated to him from his true centre.

This analogy however is incomplete in its application to man. For the tides keep their appointed places and move out and in according to natural law; and the planets have their proper centre imposed upon them and are kept in their orbits by irresistible necessity, without their concurrence or cooperation. But with man it is different; he is dignified with the use of freedom and must choose to abide in or to separate himself from the true source of inspiration. The law of love cannot be imposed upon us without our consent: but the Eternal Father is pleading with us to respond to a nature and spirit which we share already with Him. This first principle of Christianity—the principle of love is the only power which can enable us to be what we inwardly feel we ought to be.

There are other realities, however, in the moral

and spiritual world of which account must be taken. Erskine was not slow to discern the reign of sin and evil and the forces of retribution. Sin is fundamentally man's refusal to relate his life to God and to live in the filial spirit of trust, obedience, and love. It is the assertion of his own will against the Divine law within him and against the love of the Loving Father made known in Christ. Independence of God or self sufficiency is the root cause of all sin and misery. It separates from the source of life which is in the Father. How are we to learn to make the right choice? The answer he gives is by becoming acquainted with the spiritual world or in other words by learning to know God the Father, so that we may trust Him fully and love Him. We must know God not only as One whose righteousness we can understand and entirely approve, but also as One who loves us and whom we can love.

How we are to be saved comes back, as all religious problems do according to Erskine, to the question of God's real relation to man; and the essence of the situation is that God is our Father and deals with us as with children. The filial tie lies at the foundation of the Christian religion. Nevertheless the principles of it are to be found in the Divine essence. And it was an additional strength to Erskine's faith to see it implied in the nature of God. This conception is worked out in a special section of the 'Spiritual Order' under the heading of 'the Divine Son'. Philosophically it is of considerable importance and may be summarised as follows-

The very nature of all that inspires love in us, of all that we call goodness, implies a relation. We are not able to think of the absolute solitariness of love and righteousness in the Divine Being, any more than in our human relationships. If we took away the good and blessing which we cherish and reap from our associations with one another, in the home, friendship, and citizenship, love would lose its essential meaning. Its true quality is exhibited by these illustrations. By the exercise of such qualities as trust, dependence, affection, gratitude, obedience, men rise from a lower order of existence into the higher realm of goodness and brotherhood.

Now in this true community of spiritual interests and services, which characterises the noblest life on earth, there is surely to be seen the counterpart of the Divine Being. At any rate Erskine refused to believe that it could exist in man and not in God. Surely it cannot be that the source that moves our love and reverence and inspires the highest idea of fellowship lacks that quality of community in itself by which it binds us together. To quote his own words-(Spiritual Order, p.34) "I am persuaded that the highest and truest reason will adhere to the principle that there is no goodness of which God is not the proper fountain." and if so, there must be in the Unity of Love a difference. Love implies both a giving and receiving- a double Personality- and this God includes in Himself as Father and Son, the 'originative and dependent love'.

The idea of Sonship



Sonship as the ultimate principle that underlies creation and redemption was all important in Erskine's belief. It sheds light in every direction; it gives new meaning to our whole conception of the spiritual world and man's place in it, as having its unity founded on the principle of trust or reciprocity. Trust, obedience, submission cease to be imposed upon us, and become the insight of our love in response to the Eternal Love. The Son, who is eternally one with the Father, becomes the fit channel of the life and spirit of God to the whole spiritual order. It was Erskine's belief that the spiritual order would ultimately embrace all.

A flood of light is shed, he thought, on the meaning of the words, 'the blessedness of trust', when we see in Christ, historically revealed the perfect Truster and Believer, living perfectly the divine life of Sonship, and exhibiting fully the filial heart of dependence and love; and in the power of trust securing the victory over death and triumphing over all defeat and disaster. We instinctively feel Jesus to be godlike and that God is declaring Him to be His unique Divine Son- the Lord and Saviour and Head of man; and though at first sight the claim seems to be for Himself alone, it is really a claim on behalf of every human being to be the child of God.

The conception of Fatherhood and trust, which came in with the new life in Christ, Erskine held unwaveringly thro. his life and in all his writings and letters, was the living heart of Christianity. He sought to present it with all the simplicity

that is in Jesus. He takes it up as Christ left it. God is our Father in the natural and beautiful sense- that He has toward men the love and fidelity that we know best in parents. He holds all men dear and prizes their love in return as a good earthly father or mother devotedly loves a child and longs that he may grow up to respond to love and devotion. And God is available to us and to our needs, just as a good parent is to his children- only in an infinite sense. This is Fatherhood as Erskine conceived it- a most real, practical, and vital thing- the heart of God in Christ. It was the voice of the High and Holy One who inhabiteth Eternity- yet who is our Heavenly Father, calling to His children to come to Him, appealing to those divine instincts and affections, which He, their Father had begotten in them. The relation of parent to child, he profoundly believed, came nearer than anything else in the world to illustrating the fundamental relation of God to men. (*App. iv.*)

It exhibited Christianity as essentially a gospel of friendship. Father and child are related to each other in terms of friendliness. The wise and loving father does not seek to enforce his will upon the child but to draw out that trust and insight which recognises and loves his will as the truth; and the child, though dependent and retaining that humility which is awe, is not afraid. All merely servile shrinking before God is done away by that word which says:-  
 " I have not called you servants but friends."

The servility of legalism gives way before the freedom of filial trust and affection. Pondering long upon this filial note in Jesus' life and the wonderful Fatherhood behind it, we may confidently affirm that it was the main purpose of Erskine's life to make it real to the hearts of men, and to show that it was not a formula but a living fact and truth, verifiable in every experience.

We are created in this relationship, Erskine maintained, as the born children of our Father. We do not need to become the children of God: we are already: the great thing is to realise it and to live out the meaning of it. He found unsatisfactory the idea of adoption in the Pauline writings. It was inadequate to the depth of the gospel; for a born child cannot be adopted. It is already in the family of God, and an adopted child can never be born into the family. The Fatherhood is founded on the natural relation of God as the Universal Parent; but the relation may be broken or unfulfilled on man's part by sin and human selfishness. Though born to be a son, man may shut himself out of the Father's spiritual life. He may turn his face from God. Rebellion, fear, distrust may take the place of sonship. Yet the Father's love pursues him, and the Cross of Christ exhibits the extent to which God will go to win his child back.

The full content of Fatherhood.

The Fatherly Love of God in relation to sinful men manifests itself as grace. By grace is meant the freeness of the Divine love, which is not earned by any merit or worth on the part of the creature. It is a love that comes forth of its own accord to bless the undeserving. It also manifests itself as forgiveness. Its distinguishing feature is its universality. God loves all men whom He has made and desires to redeem all men for whom Christ died. All without exception are the object of God's love. God's Fatherhood, being a gracious relation to men, it would cease at once were it impersonal or restricted in its scope and in the sphere of its goodness. Arbitrary Will or Partiality in the Father's dealings with His children, Erskine declared unthinkable. " We must think of men as members of a family of which God is the Father; filial trust to the Father extending itself in brotherly love to the rest of the family." ( Fragments, the Spiritual Order- p. 237.) Since the relation was gracious and ethical, it could not in its working be mechanical or legalistic; by its very nature it must respect man's freedom and appeal by persuasion and education. It could only succeed as it met with the human response and as it won an answering love.

Every Christian doctrine must be seen and approve itself in the light of this

this gracious relationship. Salvation was an inward change possible to all and to be brought about by the revelation of the Father or the development in man of this filial sense of trust and love towards God. In Erskine's view this consciousness of sonship was indistinguishable from Christ's conception of faith. It was not an intellectual assent to any doctrine or creed; but it amounted to a childlike disposition to the Father- an attitude of pure trust, affection and fellowship. In this beautiful and enriching relationship of Fatherhood men may find and realise that vital experience of God and communion with the Divine Spirit which is the very essence of the Christian life. This great truth has its basis in experience; for it is only thro. personal experience that we can know the Father whom Jesus revealed. Besides it is a conception fitted to enlist the whole personality, to give meaning to the humblest life and service, and to meet the practical needs of our nature on every hand. The man who has gained this insight will have a basis for his faith that nothing can shake.

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### The doctrine of Predestination.

By implications of the Fatherhood of God, there arose a reason for a fresh consideration of the Calvinistic system as presented in Erskine's day, and the principles underlying it. There were hindrances in the way, he thought, arising not only from the reluctance of the natural heart to accept the Holy and Righteous will and purpose of God, but even more from the dogmatic theology, which had long lain undigested and unappropriated by the spirit. In the light of this first truth of Christianity, that God is love, Erskine set himself to face the problem of Predestination, with its related doctrine of Election: the nature and scope of the Atonement, justification, pardon, imputation, substitution, and other terms in current theological use. The first of these problems will occupy us in this section.

Predestination is the master word of the Calvinistic system. It is that form of God's Sovereignty which Scottish Theology maintained and exalted to the highest degree in its confessional system. Linked up with it are the doctrine of election and reprobation. What has Erskine to say in his teaching about this vexed and important conception?

First the doctrine is stated as it was generally held and preached and presented for acceptance. (Doctrine of Election, p.2.) God had predestinated unto salvation a certain number of individuals, according to His inscrutable

inscrutable purpose. They receive a peculiar operation of the Holy Spirit, by which they are justified, sanctified and saved. The rest are passed over, unvisited by this peculiar operation of the Spirit, and so abandoned to their sins and punishment. It is also an essential part of the doctrine, that the peculiar operation of the Spirit by which God draws the elect unto Him, is irresistible - - - so that those to whom it applies cannot be lost, and those to whom it does not apply cannot be saved.

Erschine submits that he held this doctrine for many years, modified however inconsistently, by the belief of God's love to all. " And yet when I look back to the state of my mind then, it would be truer to say that I submitted to it, than that I believed it." (Election, p.3.) It was the 9th. chap. of Romans which held him to it, because it seemed to admit of no other interpretation. Though a dark chapter, it seemed to him to sound a true note and to set forth what was true and good in the orthodox teaching. To quote his own words- (Election, p.12) " I felt there was something in the doctrine to which my own heart bore witness, as being true to experience, as well as glorifying to God viz- that there was nothing good in man, but what was of the direct acting of the Spirit of God." He never departed from this view. It is the essence and spirit of 'the Unconditional Freeness' that Christianity thro. and thro. is absolute dependence upon the grace of God. Man can initiate nothing. Salvation is of God and not of man.

Erskine was profoundly impressed with the real core of the Calvinistic doctrine in its more attractive forms. Reverence not only for God Himself, but for all that belonged to Him, His Book, His Day, His Truth, His people, His judgments, the sense of our littleness before His greatness- marked his life and every thought. ( App. V.)

A well known passage- ( quoted by Principal Shairp in the Letters, Vol.2. p.369.) gives the best account of Erskine's attitude to the orthodox teaching under consideration- what he approved and what he disapproved of. "Calvinism makes God and the thought of Him all in all, and makes the creature almost as nothing before Him. So it engenders a deep reverence, a profound humility and self abasement, which are the true beginnings of all religion. It exalts God infinitely above the creature. In this Calvinism is true and great, and I honour it. What I cannot accept is its conception of God as One in whom power is the paramount attribute, to which a loving righteousness is made quite subordinate, and its restriction of the Love of God in a way which seems to me not righteousness but partiality."

First, Erskine attacks the Predestinarian doctrine from the side of scripture. In the Doctrine of Election he considers certain passages from the Old and New Testament upon which the ordinary view of Election was supposed to be founded. Specially the 18th. chap. of Jeremiah is examined- to which



Romans ix.v.21 refers. This is taken to be a key passage for the common doctrine of election as St. Paul thought about it. What does an examination of it yield? Certainly not the common view of election: but a meaning not only different from, but opposed to the ordinary doctrine. It declared, Erskine affirmed, that the future prospects of men were placed by God in their own hands; further that its purpose was to show, not that the Potter had a right to make a vessel good or bad according to His own pleasure, but that He had a right, if a vessel turned out ill in his hands, to reject that vessel and break it down, and make it up anew into another vessel. After the vessel was marred, the purpose of God was to be fulfilled, not in making an entirely new vessel, but in making up the clay of the original marred vessel into another vessel. The right of making a thing bad is not contemplated at all in the passage. Applying it to Romans ix. Erskine maintained, that God disclaimed the Jewish notion which supposed that they were a people unconditionally elected. God asserted His right to cast off the Jews if they proved untrue and unfaithful.

This illustration of the vessels was symbolic to Erskine of man's whole spiritual history, represented in Adam and Christ. In every man there are two principles- the flesh and the spirit, the principles or seeds of the first and second vessels. Every man has the capacity to choose which of these two active principles to which he will yield himself up. These two principles are drawing him, so that he has not to

originate anything but simply to follow. The whole responsibility of man consists in his power to recognise and follow this inward drawing of God, or to reject it, according to his own personal choosing. The original differences in men cannot be accounted for. That question is hidden in the Infinite wisdom: but the Divine Sovereignty consists in appointing men's abilities, oportunities, and trials, not in determining how they shall use them, which Erskine regarded as the view in the common doctrine. [App. VI]

It cannot be said that Erskine probed to the heart of all the difficulties on this subject even from the Bible point of view. But he took a firm stand on the scriptures, and he challenged Christian thinkers to reconsider whether the interpretations that they had given to certain passages in the Bible were really right and justified. Certainly he found in them a much more hopeful and reasonable doctrine, and a better foundation for trust, hope, and comfort than the rigid logic of Calvinism provided. Was his interpretation a sound one? If we take this great and crucial passage, Rom. ix-xi. which has darkened the matter for many, Erskine's understanding of it may be considered the right one. The passage had been misinterpreted and wrongly used. St. Paul's words, in their original purpose, so far from being intended to establish the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination and election, had a wholly opposite intention. They were written

to refute a narrow and extravagant doctrine on these points, and to assert the right of God to exercise free grace wherever He willed. Erskine stood on firm ground, far in front of his time, when he held that the election of the Bible is the good one, not the bad one of the traditional theology: it is an election to service, opportunity, and responsibility not to destiny. That there is such a thing as electing grace he unhesitatingly believed. He said that the best of men look back on their life and can truthfully say that it was God who touched them and led them. But to erect that belief into a theological dogma was perilous for religion

The main force of Erskine's objection, however, is delivered against its inadequate conception of God. "The root error arises from an ignorance of God" he says-(Doctrine of Election-p.xiii f.) "and of His purposes towards us. It arises from regarding God, not as a Loving and Righteous Father, but as a Sovereign who insists on our absolute submission to His behests, indifferent whether we see and sympathise with His love and righteousness in them or not. This is to merge the moral attributes of God in His natural attributes of power and sovereignty,- it is to say of God that what He does is the rule of righteousness, instead of saying that what He does is according to righteousness." The tendency of this view is altogether wrong, he held, for it leads to a totally un-Christian conception of God- that He is more glorified,

glorified by the manifestation of His power and sovereignty in making the creature what He will, whether good or bad, than by the manifestation of the influence of an apprehension of His love and righteousness in the heart. ' This was not the religion which Jesus taught. He did not come preaching the Sovereignty of God, but preaching His righteousness, and declaring Him to be the Father.'

The gravamen of Erskine's teaching against the predestinarian doctrine is contained in these passages from the 'Doctrine of Election.' He strongly contended that it set up an irreconcilable conflict in the Personality of God and divided spiritual experience. By creating an artificial distinction between the Will and Nature of God, it set them at variance, as though qualities could be assigned to the one independently of the other. In the interests of God's power and freedom, His sovereignty becomes the expression of unrestricted choice and determination. How does Fatherhood or grace fare in this scheme? The crucial question was pushed by Erskine. For to him, that was the purest expression of the Divine nature- the freeness of the Divine love to all, the worthless and undeserving. The answer he found in Calvinism was arbitrary will. In the exercise of His absolute Sovereignty God decreed a complete reversal of His own nature and character. The wicked are passed over' for their sin' (Confession of Faith, chap.3:7.) and ordained to wrath; but for the salvation of the righteous no reason is given, except

" the secret counsel and good pleasure of God's Will." (Chap. 3:5.) The elect must be saved; the others cannot be saved.

For over 200 years this conception had dominated Scottish theology. Erskine, as we have seen, was not unmindful of the strength of the Calvinistic faith in which he had been brought up. He realised its power and significance in moulding a type of character which he admired and honoured, and which had been highly influential in the world. The Sovereignty of God was a great and glorious conception which could never be surrendered, without impairing the strength of Christianity; but it was not a Sovereignty of bare omnipotent will; it was a Sovereignty of grace and Fatherhood.

The traditional view, he held, could not fit into the human heart and conscience. Of this truth he was assured in his inmost soul. He laid bare its fatal flaw. Whatever Sovereignty be, it could not be unethical and unspiritual- that is to say absolute power and determinative authority lying back of all relation: it must be within the gracious Fatherly relationship between God and man. It is the Will of our Father, that we are to do; that will which is good, and righteous, and loving, which has been laid bare to us in Christ, and which men can understand and do by acting out their true nature.

Calvinism affirmed God's freedom but it barely acknowledged any freedom in man, which was to do violence to man as a spiritual ~~being~~.

spiritual being. Nor was this conception glorifying to God, Erskine pointed out with great cogency. The fear of attributing any glory to man in his own salvation and of taking glory from God, he thought, probably accounted for the attachment men had for the Calvinistic system. But he says-(Doctrine of Election-p. 60.) " they would do well to consider whether they are not, in fact, withholding from God the glory which He desires in man - - - a glory to His love, a freewill offering, a glory which the soul could keep back, but would not, because it loved Him."

The logic of this mighty system is unassailable granted Calvin's primal postulate that God is sovereign and inscrutable will. But Erskine perceived a wider horizon in the gospel viz:- that of boundless grace and an infinite goodness that sought real and personal fellowship with men. The traditional attempt at reconciliation, by making God the King of all and the Father of some, suggesting that His Kingly power had a wider range than His Fatherly love, was unsatisfactory from the Christian standpoint.

Erskine brought into prominence the ethical and spiritual qualities which are central in Christian faith. The faith that saves man is not blind submission and servile obedience to an arbitrary and inscrutable will: it is trust in a Fatherly God whose loving character has been unveiled in Christ, and which is dominated by a consistent redemptive purpose. True faith is a living conviction that God is love,

having a profound influence on the heart and life. It is a deeper thing than belief in a miracle; for it apprehends the true nature of God, the character of God and His Presence, seeing Him who is invisible.

It is clear that Erskine approached the central problems of theology from a new angle, and brought to their understanding a light that Calvinism had failed to supply. He was striking new ground, and ground which had to be struck: for wider ideas were entering into the thought and imagination of mankind. Under the inspiration of the fresh vision of the Divine Fatherhood, the religious thoughts of men underwent a significant change. Christianity lost the air of unreality that had surrounded it for many generations. It was made more intelligible, because God was brought nearer to His world and seen in the inner life and experience of men.

Theology in Scotland entered a new stage of development, enriched by a worthier expression of the Christian message. In this work of liberation the impress of Erskine's spirit and thoughts was deeply felt. He powerfully helped to develop our conception of the knowledge of God, lifting it to a higher plane, freeing it from unworthy ideas, and showing the vast substructure on which religion is built. He was profoundly persuaded from his own experience that the narrowing of Christian faith had brought a narrowness of world; and the limitation of salvation had implied the restriction of God's universal goodness and omnipresence in nature and the human heart,

and had impoverished the spiritual life of man. By its rigid logic the predestinarian doctrine had imprisoned the Divine love; he set it free. In all these ways and directions, his power worked for good and is still working.

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## Erskine's ideas of Christ and the Atonement.

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Erskine gave to Christ a decisive place in the relations of God and man. The appearance of Jesus Christ on the earth was the expression of an Infinite love already existing in the Father's heart. His coming into man's flesh while it lay under the burden and condemnation of sin and death had not changed God's fatherly purpose, and however overwhelming our sense of sin may be, we are yet called to trust God as our Father, and thus to come into a righteous fellowship with His will and character.

It is a chief point in the teaching of Christianity Erskine believed, that we should always have this assurance, and yet that it should be no encouragement to continue in sin. The ground of our trust must be in the unchangeableness of God and His purpose to make us righteous. The essential quality of the Godhead is love and it was to manifest the Father's unchanging love towards sinners that Christ made Atonement: to make real and effective the goodness of God to all mankind. Christ was God in the world dealing with human sin and evil.

God had never ceased to yearn and to work for the eternal good of His children, for God is love. The mission of Christ is not the result of another motive in God but a richer and fuller expression than that contained in nature and the moral world of man; for it gives the chief prominence to the love He bears to men, even in their sinfulness, and His unchangeable purpose to redeem them. Until the coming of Christ the Love of God had in a great measure to be taken on credit. And so long as

this was the case, God could not be fully known by men. But now, in the Incarnation, in the world made flesh, our eyes have seen and our hands have handled the word of life. The death of Christ is the crisis of His redemptive effort, "the point at which all the facts of the gospel meet at their centre" ( Essay on Faith- p.49) Through Christ's mission( Life, Death, and Resurrection) God the Creator has expressed Himself making known His holiness and love in Saviourhood. ( App.vii.)

The Atonement is seen by Erskine in various lights. He has no stock definitions but he sheds fresh light upon many aspects of the person and death of Christ. His first contribution to the fuller appreciation of the subject is his insistence upon looking at it from the inside i.e. within the relationship of Fatherhood. We must begin with the love of God, he urged and not by His anger and darkening thoughts of appeasement and placation. Theologians had approached this great mystery from the side of God's attributes and government, with preconceived ideas of His sovereignty of power and law, and on the basis of such ideas they had built up systems about what God ought to do in the circumstances of human apostasy. Erskine felt that this was all wrong. We must not begin by demanding conditions of God and prescribing the way He should act. The great question is- does the gospel, which centres in the sacrifice of Christ, when we search into its character, bear the authentic mark of the Spirit and essence of God? To that question there is but one answer in Erskine's view. Both from the view it gives of God and of its influence on man, its great excellence is clearly proved. By its mighty appeal to love and inner

constraint instead of outward restraint and fear, it has a powerful tendency to form the heart to the love of duty and Christian character. While the need of spiritual renovation is evident, no plan of renovation could have been at all efficient, unless it had been grounded on the truth of God's holy love which the gospel declares. God's condemnation of sin is there shown in unmistakable reality but His supreme purpose is not to condemn and destroy but to draw the sinful heart of man into a life of righteous love and goodness. In the Atonement Erskine read the highest expression and sublime glory of that entire relation in which Christ stands to God and man.

The representative nature of Christ's character  
and work.

The Father is the fountain of redemption. Christ was on this earth as the representative of the Father: as such He re-manifested God's character and purpose to men; but both before and since that time, Christ has been the pervading presence in the heart of humanity, lying "at the root and basis of our being, the continual supplier of strength" (p.78 The unconditional Freedom) Love has always been the motive of the Divine activity. The Divine Son from all eternity was in the bosom of the Father, but for love He issued forth on His redemptive work. By Him was the world created; and in love He watches over it and sustains it. Man as his birthright partakes of His very nature. But though Christ is a seed in all men, latent in the universal heart, He did not show Himself fully, until at the call of man's necessity

He became incarnate. It was in the personal Christ that God drew near in uttermost love to save sinners. That love reached its climax in the Cross.

In this twofold representative capacity Erskine regards Christ: as One united with God in Eternal Being and in perfect sympathy with His will and purpose and also united to man in his real humanity, and in perfect sympathy with him; for His own nature is the fulness of that which men already possess. Thus He is the true meeting place for the reconciliation.

Into Christ's character man can truly enter: and He is such a Person that to come into moral and spiritual fellowship with Him is to come into fellowship with God. Christ thus becomes the Head of a new humanity, into which all His people enter, and it is as the Head of the whole human race that we must regard Him.

" When we contemplate Christ lifted up on the Cross" Erskine says in (the Brazen Serpent- p. 35) " and see in Him the Son of God, in our very nature, suffering by His own will, enduring sorrow and death for our sins, that thus He might as the head of our nature become the righteous channel of divine life to every individual, and know that this was the forthcoming of the Eternal Love of the Father, we have a glorious and blessed truth concerning our God, which might well quicken those dead in the disbelief of God's love and be strength and comfort to the sorrowing heart."

### The sacrifice of Christ

Erskine believed that the conception of the organic Headship of Christ offered the most fruitful thoughts on the Atonement.

In seeking to educe its meaning and the blessing that flows to men from it, he was led to examine and reject the view of substitution that was generally accepted. This latter view, he said, had come in place of and had cast out the true doctrine of the Headship of Christ. Christ died for every man, as the head of every man- not by any fiction of law, not in a conventional way, but in reality as the head of the whole mass of human nature, which, although composed of many members, is one thing- one body in every part of which the Head is present.

The virtue of Christ's sacrifice is intimately connected with His being the root of humanity. He did not take hold of a branch; He took the very root. He came into the place which Adam had occupied. However, as far as Christ was merely the representative of the whole of humanity His death as a sacrifice could not be a reason or ground for bestowing a blessing on humanity. What was that ground?

The answer Erskine gives is as follows:- In this capacity, as the Head of a new humanity, Christ fulfilled the whole will of God: He accepted the suffering which is always connected with sin, bore it willingly, not as we are to see to free us from our sufferings, but to call each of us to accept God's whole will gladly as He accepted it and to follow Him. Thus in all this doing and suffering- Jesus gave such glory to God, He so met and fulfilled the desires of God's heart and the longings of His love, and the purity of His holiness- in other words He so declared the righteousness of God in condemning sin and in forgiving the sinner- that it became God, as the God of Holy Love \_\_\_\_\_

to bestow the blessing through Him i.e. to make Him the foundation of a new life to that nature which He had assumed and for which He had made Atonement.

The substitution theory is rejected on the following grounds:-

(1) It would not be thought justice in an earthly judge were he to accept the offering of the sufferings of an innocent person, as a satisfaction for the lawful punishment of a guilty person. As the work of Christ was wrought to manifest the righteousness of God, it is not credible that that work should contain a manifestation really opposed to their minds and consciences. Taking the analogy of Adam, Erskine says that unless Christ had been truly the head and root of our nature, He could not have tasted death for every man and His resurrection could not necessarily have involved every man. But He was truly the head of the offending nature, and in His suffering the offending nature suffered the righteous sentence of God. It was no fiction of law. He suffered as the condemned head: He rose as the righteous head.

(2) Christ did not suffer the punishment of sin to dispense with our suffering it, but to change the character of our suffering, from an unsanctified and unsanctifying suffering into a sanctified and sanctifying one. When Christ speaks to His disciples about the Cross and His sufferings, He invariably calls upon them to take up their cross and follow Him by the same road of suffering. This connection is marked through all the evangelists. Matt. 16;(21-25): Mark 8;(31-35): Luke 9;(22-24):

John 12;(23-26). These passages all prove that the substitution of Christ did not consist in this, that He suffered something instead of men, so as to save them from doing it or suffering it for themselves. It was done for a far different purpose e.g. He fulfilled the law of love certainly not with the view of saving us from fulfilling it, but on the contrary, with the very view of enabling us to fulfil it.

(3) Substitution is inconsistent with the true nature of the punishment of sin. For it supposes that punishment is an arbitrary or conventional thing, appointed merely to maintain the dignity of the law giver, but which may be dispensed with, without the sinners suffering thereby any loss, if that dignity is otherwise secured. But this is a completely false view of punishment and chastening. There is something to be done by penal suffering which cannot be done without it. Suffering is not a ceremony but a purification. In the Brazen Serpent p.43 Erskine asks the question- what is the great thing Christ has accomplished by suffering for us? He has become head of new and uncondemned life to every man, in the light of which we may see God's love in the law and the punishment, and may thus suffer to the glory of God and draw out from the suffering the blessing it contains.

#### The subjective side of the Atonement

Although Christ's work is not substitutional, it is work He has done for us that no other could have done. He did not die to save us from dying, but that we might, in His power, die with Him to sin and rise into newness of life.

If we surrendered our life to the Father in loving confidence, as He did, we should be partakers of His resurrection. He lived by filial trust, committing everything to God, thus giving us guidance and encouragement. And He did this not as an individual but as the head of the race. God's favour always rests upon Him; and we as members always share in a true and real sense in that favour; and in order to be right with God have only to open our hearts to its influence. Faith is just opening our eyes to receive the sunshine and to take the proffered mercy of God. So long as we are not doing so (i.e. shutting our eyes to the sunshine and refusing the ray that is meant for us) we cannot but remain unblessed.

We must have appropriating faith to enter into the blessings of Christ's sacrifice. No suffering of a penalty for sin by another in our place, can put away sin: for sin is a spiritual thing and can only be put away by a return to righteousness. None can enter into Christ's life and victory except by partaking in His trust. There is no legal fiction about it. It is a direct and vital act of personal trust. In the Saviour's atoning sacrifice there must be found help for men here. And so it is. In the victory of our Head He has given us an all sufficient foundation for the most absolute trust in God. None but a Son could have made this revelation and none but those who are created in the Son could be capable of apprehending or receiving it. Jesus came to draw the hearts of men back to the Father and He did it by His own life of filial trust.

By thus believing a man is truly united to Christ, and



Christ lives in him and he in Christ. And this is salvation- life in Christ thro. the Atonement. Paul speaks of having fellowship in Christ's sufferings. Upon that remark, Erskine has a fine word to say. He does not mean having grief because Christ suffered for us; it means having the same grief and this no man can possibly have until he has in him that very loving spirit that grieved in Jesus. We are not called on to love men because Christ loves them, or to hate sin because He hates it; but we are called on to love men with Christ's own love and to hate evil with Christ's own hatred. It is only by Christ living and dwelling in us that we can do it; then it will be no more we, but Christ loving or hating in us. This life, Erskine says, entered into the Apostle and was maintained in him by the belief of Christ's dying love. "And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

The supremacy of Faith and the doctrine of  
Justification.

Erskine deprecated the idea of a peculiar theological righteousness that a man thinks he must possess founded on a special theological faith. As Christ taught men simply to put their trust in their Heavenly Father for all good, so he regarded faith as an act of loving trust in Christ's dying love, which consisted in the divine abhorrence of sin and the love of righteousness. When men recognise their true position, and love

righteousness and renounce evil in an earnest endeavour, faith has been at work; for faith is an activity of the soul which beholds the light of grace as the eye beholds the sunlight, and responds by opening the heart to the divine goodness and righteousness. This simple act of self committal to God in Christ is the vitality of all religion; yet to Erskine it appeared that its conversion into a theological doctrine was one of the greatest triumphs of the enemy of souls.

For what is Justification by Faith as Paul conceived it? He takes Romans I:17 as the key to Paul's great statement on Justification in conjunction with Gal.3:2. which helps to shed light on it, and interprets its meaning as follows:- No man can fulfil the law perfectly. Besides the law was equivalent to regulations to help men to live in an evil world: it was not deliverance from a sinful world and all its powers of darkness. What then? How can a man live? Paul took this to mean- <sup>though</sup> that it was impossible to gain life by obeying the law, it was possible to do so by simple reliance on God. Faith, therefore, to Paul is that attitude of trust; acknowledging our complete insufficiency for any of the high ends of life, we rely utterly on the sufficiency of God. By such a faith a man enters into life. It is to cease from all assertion of the self- even by way of effort after righteousness and to make room for the divine initiative. (App. viii.)

Such was Paul's conception of faith and Erskine's own. Justification was not to make righteous but to be put in a position of right standing

standing thro. the Atoning work of Christ. This does not refer to character but to our condition. We are put into Christ's standing that we may receive His spirit and character. " We see then that righteousness by faith does not consist in any record of past obedience or services- but that it consists simply in a man's personally and consciously meeting God in his own heart, and surrendering himself to Him as to One who is trustworthy. This is the living principle of all doctrines and of the Christian life." ( Doctrine of Election: p. 226.)

Erskine rejected any legalistic view which obscured the personal connection between God and man. Justification as " a juridical scheme or a forensic trial and sentence" was behind the Christian experience of Calvinism and vitiated, he thought, the whole conception of faith and salvation. In a letter to Dr. Gloag ( Letters Vol.2-p.203) he says- "I can see many causes for the marked unfruitfulness of religious instruction amongst us but I am persuaded that the chief are that the judicial character of God is made to swallow up and conceal His paternal character: that thus Christ is viewed as a refuge from the Father instead of the way to Him." When faith is conceived in this way it has an air of unreality. Erskine regarded it as most real and personal. It brings a man into moral unity and fellowship with Christ, by which he realises his own sin and need and the reality of God's saving mercy; and he enters upon a new life joined to the living Christ. This is just the beginning not the end of the process, which is the complete sanctification of the life by the doing of

the whole will of God. However, God sees in the man the principle and powers by which this will be completed and freely acts toward him as a man redeemed from sin.

The conception of imputed righteousness, Erskine rejected, as a legal fiction which should be abolished from Theology. It is not in the scriptures nor in harmony with the gospel. Besides he said it is founded on untruth, that God through some quality in Christ, should account to men something as if it were theirs, although He knew that it was not actually so. A man is justified not by a righteousness imputed to him, but by a righteousness wrought in him by Christ.

Righteousness cannot be vicarious, he held: yet its attainment may be facilitated by conditions which do not depend on our actings but on those of another. He thought that this consideration helped us to a true sense in which Jesus is set forth as a propitiation. The righteous character of the Atonement made it a propitiation. "It was not Christ's blood that satisfied the Father's heart, but Christ's faith while shedding it, his faith in laying down His life in fulfillment of the Father's will." (Spiritual Order: p. 158.) In His capacity as Saviour God was well pleased to look upon the Son, who had done everything by His perfect trust and sacrificial death to win men back to Himself and to a life of righteousness. But God had further satisfaction- in seeing in His Son the expression of His own character and especially of His own sacrificial Heart which had always been suffering for sin and acting in righteousness towards sinners/

sinners. No one could set forth the divine righteousness save Himself. Christ as it were objectified God to Himself. In his life and death, God saw the perfect reflection of His eternal love and righteousness, which is the ground of all faith.

The Atonement in its scope and fruitfulness.

I. Its Universality. It was not at first that Erskine came boldly out as a champion of universal Redemption. His Calvinistic instincts and training held him back and certain views of Paul seemed to stand in the way. But these obstacles yielded: and the universal significance of Christ's death became his dominating passion to proclaim.

In the 'Unconditional Freeness of the gospel' p.14 he says:- "The love of God is to the human spirit as the keystone to the arch" and in that work he set himself in opposition to any restriction of Christ's Atoning work and sacrifice. The keystone however has fallen from its place and all has in consequence gone wrong with man. Man's great misery is that he has left God- the centre of his being- and everything is in disorder. The moral consciousness proclaims his guilt and responsibility. Now the first effect of Christianity is to convince us that nothing of independent moral effort can help man. "It is impossible that the creature can perform a single spiritual act, whilst it continues in the spirit of independence." (UNconditional Freeness p.68.) and further on he declares that he would consider the great purpose of Christianity

absolutely defeated, were it possible for man to become a Christian by his own unassisted efforts or without a conviction of the necessity of divine assistance. The remedy which God has given to man is the gospel. And the gospel is just the manifestation of the true character and inmost heart of God in the life, sufferings, and death of Christ. In Erskine's eyes it was summed up as belief in the inexhaustible love of God the Father for man, and in this great fund of Divine love every man partakes, as in the air and sunshine. The very universality exhibited in the sufferings and sacrifice of Christ destroyed all restrictions and narrowing of the divine purpose and intention. Christ loved and died for all. The Cross was an appeal addressed to humanity to return to God who wished it so and by that is meant every individual within it.

The extent of the Atonement had greatly exercised the Scottish theological mind in time past. The older Calvinists believed that Christ, in some altogether peculiar sense was the Saviour of His people. "But was there no sense in which He might have been said to die also for others?" asks Dr. Walker. Fraser of Brea asserts that men are all fundamentally justified in Him and by Him, that Christ died for all. But then are all men saved? No. God did not mean to save any but His chosen. The Marrow theology was an attempt to modify Calvinism and to tone down its asperities to the non-elect. And ever since the days of the Marrow great importance had been attached to a free offer of the gospel to all souls;

but the difficulty was, that though the door seemed to be opened slightly to the unprivileged, it came to the something in the end: for none but the elect could go in and they could not help themselves. But for the others the offer must necessarily be futile. Logical consistency seemed to be with the older Calvinists rather than with the modified ones.

Erskine vigorously repudiated these ideas and dispelled the darkness by letting in the sunlight of the Gospel. To his serious and loving heart it was all quite 'inconsistent with the truthfulness and goodness of God.'  
(App. ix)

## 2. The Atonement as Forgiveness.

Christ's death, in its fruitfulness, secured for all mankind the forgiveness of sins. Erskine understood forgiveness to be absolutely unconditional and unrestricted. "The pardon of the gospel is, in effect, a declaration on the part of God to every individual sinner in the whole world, that His holy compassion embraces him, and that the blood of Jesus has atoned for all sins." (Unconditional Freeness- p.42.)

So carried away was Erskine with the divine forgiveness in the Cross and its unconditional character, that he was led into a strange confusion of statement: whereby he declared that pardon belonged to every man whether he believed it or not. He meant that all men were forgiven in the amplitude of the Divine love and were the children of God:

but of course they must realise it and live as the redeemed children of God.

Erskine thought he saw in the current theology a tendency to fetter the free forgiveness of God in two ways wholly unworthy of what God had done in Christ for mankind. It was made to depend too much on faith consciously ascertained and it was restricted by divine election.

On the first point, he objected to the view that we are to believe in order that we may be forgiven or justified. It was putting the wrong thing first. We are to believe, he said, that we are forgiven. When a man looks into his own mind and seeks for evidences of his spiritual condition, whether he is in a real state of faith and grace, he is not adopting a right attitude to the forgiveness which Christ freely offers to all. These things will follow. But the supreme consideration is- that there is no uncertainty in the forgiveness of sins. The very first demand that the gospel makes upon us in relation to Christ's Atoning death is that we believe that there is forgiveness with God. If we first direct attention inwards into the consciousness to see if our faith is sincere and our condition of heart right, we are trusting in something in ourselves and not looking entirely to God. It has the tendency to make pardon and Eternal life rewards bestowed on those who believe, and as marks of God's approbation of faith. That is not the true ground of the believer's hope, but the grace of God as free as the air we breathe. In a letter to M. Gaussen( Letters: Vol.



Vol.I. p. 294) he says:-"Why is a poor sinner to trust in God? Is it because God is good, or because he has faith? Am I to trust in God because God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself or because I am justified by faith?"

To that sublime fact- the love that shines from the face of God in Christ crucified- every human being is to look first. The experience will be annihilating; for every man in the light of it will see his sin; and penitence, sorrow, and a new desire for fellowship will be the result. But the assurance is absolutely necessary and it is given in the Atonement, where God is truly seen opening the inviting arms of His love to perishing sinners, and urging them to come to Him that they may have life. It is the vision of God that leads to repentance. We must ever begin there and Erskine's great object was to withdraw the attention from the act of believing and to fix it on the object.

In a long article in the Christian Instructor( Vol. 27: 1828 pp.410) Dr. Andrew Thomson, the champion of Orthodoxy attacked Erskine's positions on forgiveness and on the freeness of the divine love. He condemns Erskine's principle of assurance as underlying the whole book. No doubt Erskine was provocative in dwelling so much upon assurance and so little on the need for repentance. Thomson's views, however, seem to signify a departure from original Calvinism. In the Confession of Faith p.12: chap. 18: par.2. it says:- " This certainty - - is an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine

truth of the promises of salvation." Another writer, in the same volume of the Instructor (p.306) refutes the Church position of Thomson and declares that Erskine's is the good old doctrine of the Reformation. Dr. Owen is quoted as defining faith in his Catechism thus:- " Faith is a gracious resting upon the free promises of God in Jesus Christ, with a firm persuasion of heart that God is a reconciled Father to us, in the Son of His love."

On the second point, Erskine objected to the fettering of forgiveness by divine election, which kept it aloof from the generality of mankind. A candid examination of Dr. Thomson's lengthy review aforesaid, leaves no doubt in the mind that the Calvinism of Erskine's day maintained unbendingly the bad view of Election and a limited Atonement. The case against Erskine is made to rest upon dark and narrow apprehensions of the divine love and forgiveness, which no longer commend themselves to the vast majority of Christian people. (App. x.)

Erskine complained that the theologians of his time had unworthy conceptions of forgiveness, because they misconceived God's true relationship to men and theirs to Him. They did not think of Him as a Father; and they never felt that the prime certainty of Christianity was absolutely true; at least they did not take it to be so, and feel free to trust the love of God. What is forgiveness? Erskine asks. Lying in the background of Calvinism, he says, is the picture

of the law courts, with judge and prisoner facing each other. But there is no personal relationship between the judge and the person charged before him. The prisoner is not affected with sorrowful thoughts towards the judge as one whom he has wronged with his evil conduct. Nor does he expect the judge to think of him, except in the terms of the law and his offence, and the punishment due. The best that can happen to the prisoner is acquittal on evidence.

But to Christian faith God is not simply the Sovereign and Judge but the Father who loves and because He loves gives. When we remember that 'God commendeth His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' the offence and the pardon are seen in a new light. God on His part desires to restore the broken relationship between His human child and Himself: and his child does not think of being let off or escaping suffering but only to know that nothing he has done may exclude him from the fellowship of his father's love. That Erskine declares, is what the Divine Forgiveness means and secures. It is the renewal of personal union with God and faith is the loving acceptance of that union.

Such a faith, resting on the divine mercy alone, radically deals with the evil itself, and not merely with the consequences of sin. The forgiven soul comes to realise how great its need of God is. God's love to us is the only thing that can lead us to love Him. And so in and thro. this new communion with God sinful men receive the greatest impulse to

to Christian gratitude and love, and their obedience is attached to truth and righteousness.

Exception might be taken to some of the views herein set forth. They are far from supplying us with a full presentation of the profound problems of the Personality of Christ and His work of Atonement. Many of the things which Erskine has to say in regard to faith are of doubtful meaning. That he should have dwelt so exclusively on pardon and had so little to say about the need for penitence as a condition or at least an accompaniment of forgiveness is perplexing. He seems to have largely forgotten that in the actual world, many live unconscious of their divine privileges, that their need of God is but dimly felt; and though the remedy is all sufficient there is the serious problem of bringing home to them their sense of need for it. The awakened conscience and the penitential prayer of the heart were not so common as Erskine imagined and his solution is conceived more simply and narrowly than the facts justify.

But defective and exaggerated though some of his statements may be and his interpretations of scripture erroneous, he saw to the heart of the gospel and lifted these paramount questions into an ethical and spiritual light far above the conceptions of his day. Like St. Paul, he started with the primary certainty of his own Christian experience

that there is only one way of salvation, and that a gracious one. Into this new and rich world of grace and forgiveness, Christ the Head has brought all men: and not till we find ourselves in it, where the Divine Love is the great certainty, can we begin to think aright about the meaning and glory of God's Atonement for human sin. Erskine's un-failing emphasis upon the appeal of the love of God in Christ is his distinctive contribution to this doctrine. He broke free from the entanglement of artificial and conventional ideas; showed that transaction, ransom, satisfaction, substitution, imputation were misused metaphors; and that we must interpret it in moral and spiritual terms. (App. XI)

By his insistence on God's Fatherly love as the ultimate ground for the Atonement, and by using the conception of love to interpret more spiritually the terms forgiveness, sacrifice, reconciliation he gave the doctrine a new moral significance. The personal element had been largely lost sight <sup>in</sup> of the lower categories used of God; but the truth about love, as Erskine persistently declared, can never be truly expressed by the use of terms which belong to the law courts.

May there not be, he asked in effect, an overcoming of sin by other means than substitution, a change of heart which is not a transaction, a true communion with God which is not legal, a suffering which is not penal but ethical? These questions were worth urging in Erskine's day, and if today they have ceased to concern theologians, the changed outlook

is in no small degree due to his influence.

Erskine's conceptions proceed from a great and adequate Christology and doctrine of man. He stakes everything upon Christ and His redeeming work on the Cross. He holds to His real humanity: but he sees Him chiefly as the Eternal Son, the head of a new humanity; as One who lives at the centre of man's experience and of the universe. There is life for man only in the grace of the Beloved Son and in looking to Him with affectionate trust. As a child of God and made in the Divine image man's life has an eternal worth and dignity; but thro. self-will he lives in great distress as the servant of sin. There is no hope for man in himself or his own efforts. God must clothe Himself in the vesture of Grace and <sup>true</sup> Redemption. Only in Christ can we come by a knowledge of God the knowledge which we need, of His will or mind or heart, that can bring us life; and through Him there came a new indwelling of the Spirit of God in man. But that is not all.

Erskine was a profound realist. All thinking upon the great Christian issues must translate itself into life and experience. Practically considered- self-sacrificing love is the heart of Christianity, and it must become the dominating motive and reality in every life. What is objective must become subjective. If the Cross is just a dogma, it is nothing. Our acceptance of Christ involves our identification with Him. It is here the old theories and claims of the Church fall short. Erskine saw beyond them; at least he

directed attention to an inward truth that merely objective views had hidden. We must incarnate the Atonement to believe in it and to understand it. Erskine believed that this was the central and vital doctrine of the Pauline theology- a real and living experience of Christ, and the modern view will not think him far wrong. Christ died for sinners but only that sinners might die with Him to their lower selves. We truly share Christ's sufferings and partake of His sacrifice only when we learn to die to self and to live for others. This is what love involves: and if we truly discern the work of Christ's Atonement, we shall recognise the infinite wideness of that love fellowship which we are to seek to promote.

## Life in the Holy Spirit.

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In a speculative sense, Erskine has no teaching on this great mystery; but with the Spirit as a vital reality, lying at the basis of religious experience and theology, his thoughts are constantly occupied. All his teaching on conscience, the Headship of Christ, the inwardness of religion and man's experience of direct intercourse with God, testifies to the prominence he gave to this vital doctrine. Indeed it may be confidently claimed that he regarded the crucial thing in the Christian life to be the work of the Holy Spirit Himself. The power of Christianity, he never ceased to urge, is that which is experienced in a man's soul. But these religious feelings, thoughts, and affections are not originated by ourselves: they are directly caused and wrought upon us by the presence and action of the Spirit of God. Nothing in Christianity proceeds from man's initiative but is the result of the divine self communication, progressively given and received.

(I) Erskine gave the Holy Spirit a wide significance. It was the diffused power of God discoverable everywhere in the universe, through whom God communicated Himself in the conscience, ideals, and progress of humanity. The indwelling presence or internal witness was first identified with conscience or Christ,



Christ the Head, who, as we have seen, was a spiritual seed or root in every man. The Spirit is a truly universal reality with a world-wide work to do, directly operating on the human soul and felt by all. This was consonant with his whole idea that the Christian religion was designed not to save just a few select individuals but the world.

Strong objection was taken to the view that confined the Holy Spirit to special channels of operation. That the Church had exclusive possession of grace, and that the Holy Spirit could only be mediated through an ecclesiastical body was quite unacceptable and a narrowing of Christian truth.

In a letter to Prof. Lorimer ( Vol.2: Letters- 1858) he writes as follows:- " I cannot draw a distinct line between inspiration in the Bible and inspiration out of the Bible: but I am sure that all God speaks to us thro. others or from without is intended to make us better apprehend what He is speaking to each one of us in the secret of our own being." There is evidence, however, that he advanced beyond this view for in his last thoughts contained in the Spiritual Order, his words are quite unqualified about the manifestation of a special and wonderful divine purpose in the history of the Bible- quite apart from all other history. However, he detested any narrowing of the Spirit's operations.

Dr. Thomson, he says, had frequently repeated that Christ was only to be met with in the Church, and that the light in man only answered to the ministrations of the

ordained ministers in the Church. ( Letters- Vol.I, p.210.) " I know that this is not so" he answers, " it is at variance with all that I know and feel of the first elementary principle of true religion. In his zeal for a Church he seems to me to lose sight of the individual personality of that intercourse with God thro. His Spirit within us, which is the basis and only basis of religion." ( App. xii.)

(2) Erskine restored the Holy Spirit to the place of fundamental importance which it had occupied in the Reformation doctrine. Calvin had given it a high place in his teaching and the Westminster divines had given it great prominence in the Confession. ( Chap.I:5.) " Notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." This important message had been largely forgotten and though held theoretically, the Calvinism of Erskine's day laid far more stress on the infallible authority of the scriptures, their plenary inspiration and credal expression, than on the progressive illumination and inward work of the Spirit. Forgetful of the Confession, there was, as Erskine declared, much idolatry of a static Christianity and a strange distrust of the spiritual view that revelation is always going on thro. the ever present activity of the Holy Spirit.

In a letter to Dr. Chalmers- May 1832( Letters:

Vol. I, p. 190.) ( in which Erskine refers to the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit in the heart as a far greater thing than any outward miracles, a belief cordially accepted by both) he makes some strong remarks about a Church putting a Confession of Faith in the place of the Living Spirit, and goes on to say- " Surely the Westminster divines did not exhaust the Bible; and if they had the Spirit, surely the divines of our day are not excluded from the Spirit; and if so, they ought to thank God for what light was seen before, and press on to farther light in the strength of the Spirit."

Such a sentence goes to the root of the failure of the traditional theology. It was a bold thing for him to say in his day, and he suffered for it. But it was largely true, as he said, that the neglect of it accounted for much of the deadness and stagnation in the Church life and thought of the time, and he set it to return to the perpetual fount of inspiration.

(3) The value of Erskine's contribution to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit consists in two things. (a) its simple and practical nature: and he sets the Spirit in relation to the work of Christ. (b) the experience of that divine life in which the purpose of Christ's mission is fulfilled thro. the agency of the Spirit.

(a) Erskine's views of the Holy Spirit are simple and practical. He attempts no definitions, and sometimes he does not distinguish between the Spirit and the Living Christ, the

terms being used interchangeably as sometimes with the New Testament writers. He has no metaphysical interest in the inner relations of the Godhead: but he gives tremendous weight to the work of the Holy Spirit in the world and the Divine Life made known in the heart, will, and mind of men. In all he has to say he keeps close to the New Testament and to his own experience.

The Holy Spirit is not merely the immanent life of God in the soul of man but the special and distinctive influence which God exerts upon individual souls that respond to His love in Christ. The Spirit's witness is about Christ and to confirm the truth as it is in Christ, given to help His disciples to realise their own lives. There is a necessary incompleteness of the revelation of the historical Jesus; but after Christ came the Holy Spirit and God's action of love is continued in the work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit's work is essentially to make real, effective, and to crown the saving mission and vitalising work of Christ in the human heart, and to perfect it in the world. It is not to be understood as a mere influence, but as the Personal God Himself as a Spirit coming into contact with the spirits of men. Christ the Head is the foundation of a new life in man's nature; and "that life is nothing less than the very life which is in the Father and manifested in the Son. That life is the Holy Spirit." (Letters: Vol. I, p.288.) Christ is therefore not merely the revelation of the Spirit but the

source of the Spirit to us. It is only as man receive and respond to the knowledge of God in Christ, that they can know and experience in its fulness the power of the Holy Spirit. The seat of the Spirit, Erskine believed, is chiefly in man's heart and will; but His work is also in the mind.

At the close of his book on Faith, (Essay on Faith-pp.133.) he gives some cogent reasons for believing in the vital work of the Holy Spirit. He imagines an earnest enquirer, who has carefully thought upon all he has written in his book of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, saying something like this. I am conscious of a void which I have never yet been able to fill and I have an intimate conviction that it never can be filled except by Christianity. I am satisfied that your views of Christianity are true; that it is adapted to the needs and cravings of the human mind and heart and will; and that its truths have been attested in the experience of men. But with all this conviction and admiration I have never felt my heart moved. Views are not enough. I want spiritual holiness. I see that if I could bring my heart into what you call contact with the high things of God, all would be well. But this I cannot do. You have shown me the mechanism of the matter but where does the power come from?

To which questionings the answer is given. It can only come from God- the Holy Spirit, the source of the Divine Life. " You have reached that point where human assistance is

nothing. I cannot put life into this machinery, either for myself or for you. But I know who can, and so do you."

This is the fundamental work of the Holy Spirit in the individual soul. It is He who makes real in men the divine life and bestows that vital communion, without which there <sup>can</sup> be neither faith nor life in God. And this is how Erskine sums up the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart:- " Whose operation is wonderful, whose high and gracious office it is, to take of the things that are Christ's, and show them to the souls of sinners; and without whom no son of man has ever believed unto Everlasting Life. An absolute and childlike dependence on the Holy Spirit for light, and strength, and comfort, is a constituent part of the Christian life." ( Essay on Faith: p.144) The work of restoration in all its parts and in all its glory belongs to God. In men the deepest humility is required connected with the highest confidence.

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It is noteworthy that the last, of hundreds of letters contained in the two volumes, written to Mrs. Macnab, under date Feb. 1870, when Erskine was very weak in body and suffering much he testifies to the same belief in the wonderful work of the Spirit. ( Letters: Vol. 2, p.334.) " I need the Holy Spirit to quicken my cold <sup>4</sup> affections, and to help me to apprehend what is contained in the unspeakable gift of Christ."

(b) The Holy Spirit convicts men of sin and reveals the divine righteousness. It convicts men by the sheer beauty

and glory of God, seen at its climax in the Cross. It is present at the inception of faith: but its work is ever present and progressive; sustaining, educating, and fulfilling the divine life in the human soul.

Both the scriptures and the experimental knowledge of the heart teach us the nature of that divine life in man, which the Holy Spirit bestows. It consists in Holy Love, born out of gratitude to God in Christ for His love to us, and awakened by the sense of His boundless grace. Further, it will partake of the quality of self sacrifice and service to men, because to have true fellowship with Christ which the Divine life is, is to share the deepest and most intimate experiences and qualities of His life.

How is the Divine life to be nourished? There are many helps which Erskine touches upon, the Word, the Church, the sacraments, worship: but chiefly he dwells upon prayer. The prayer life, he says, is the greatest help whereby the soul achieves communion with God. "Contact with God" he says in Essay on faith: p. 134- "and with the things of God is only another name for prayer." Quoting the words of our Lord- "Your Heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them who ask it" he remarks how inexpressibly consoling they are. Again he says- the belief of this doctrine is an element essential to the Christian character. It keeps the soul waiting upon God, and nourishes the sentiment of humble and affectionate dependence, which on the human side is the basis

of religion. The conclusion of the matter is- let us ask then the gift of the Holy Spirit; and let us ask in earnest and persistently until we receive. " Let us live with the eyes of our souls fixed on the face of the Redeemer, in daily and hourly expectation of an answer in peace. It will surely come. God is faithful who has promised." ( Faith-p.135)

Erskine believed profoundly in the Trinitarian conception. He found the doctrine essential to and implied in every part of the New Testament; but where the New Testament stops he stops. One supreme test, he applied to every doctrine. Does it enrich our conception of God? In his estimation the character of the Divine Being gains immensely in richness, beauty, and impressiveness when it receives into it the redemptive life of Christ and the continued spiritual watchfulness of the Holy Spirit over the progress of truth thro. the world, and in each particular heart. By such a view, he held, our minds are usefully acted upon and our hearts are impressed and imbued with saving knowledge of the highest value to character, To quote his own words- ( The Internal Evidence- p.96.) " It stands in scripture indissolubly united with an act of Divine Holiness and compassion, which radiates to the heart an appeal of tenderness most intelligible in its nature and object, and most constraining in its influence."

The conception arose out of a rich experience and



was the natural unfolding of a new apprehension of God which the first Christians had actually lived thro. Their view of God was purely monotheistic: yet the One God- Lord of all things, Father of men- whom they knew and worshipped was the same whom they saw in self sacrifice on the Cross: or as Erskine well puts it- the first great affirmation of Christian experience is, ' God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish but have Everlasting Life.' Afterward, the same people knew themselves to be laid <sup>hold</sup> by a Divine Spirit or Power, which mediated to them God the Father and Christ the Saviour, and which completely changed their lives. Or as he put it- the second great affirmation of Christian experience is this- ' But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things.'

Behind these simple statements, he urged, is the belief and vital experience that created Christianity. This is the true doctrine of the Trinity. It is hewn out of the rock of Revealed truth and living experience. In every way it is fitted to appeal to the understanding, the heart, and the conscience, and to illuminate the whole inner life of man. But very different is the statement of the Confessional theology- where the doctrine is made to bear simply on the nature of the Divine essence, and the mysterious fact of the

Three in One. As such it becomes an incomprehensibility. Even if the mind can comprehend it, he says, it has no influence on the heart, will, and conscience. So he concludes that the doctrine cannot be properly thought of apart from the experience that created it, and the experience that receives it. But so regarded its meaning is essential to Christian faith and life.

In all these thoughts Erskine is working near the heart of things. We may well be thankful, that in an age of artificial and conventional thinking upon these high themes, he taught a strong and living doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He put it in place of creeds and even the Church. Christian experience must be reckoned with; and it is infinitely more important that men should have a consciousness of God in the exceeding richness and power of His Spirit within them, than a knowledge that merely speculates about Him. By emphasising this great fact and reality in Christian experience, Erskine gave glory to the richness and greatness of God, as ever self-revealing and self-imparting, and he also put hope and confidence into man's struggle. Confidence in the living Spirit of God, graciously working within as well as triumphantly ordering all things without, is the spring and mainstay of Christian power. It is also the recognition of progress in man's religious knowledge and experience.

Erskine taught the Church of his day larger truths of God's boundless grace

grace, and gave it a broader view of the Holy Spirit's work. It had thought too narrowly of the Spirit's activities. It was thought irreverent to believe that the Spirit of God could be as creative and active in the present as in the golden age that was past. This was to make faith ineffective and to cramp theology. The Church cannot live without a living sense of the present divine energy of the Spirit. It was part of Erskine's mission to his day to reinstate this great truth among the living practical beliefs of men.

Theology, he held, must seek a broader basis of truth and widen her survey of man's spiritual needs and experience. All good that appears in men is the action of God's Spirit; but the great God is working beyond the pale of the visible Church. Christian good is springing up far beyond our sight, for the Living Spirit is at work everywhere. It is not probable that God has ever left the world, or man's life in it, uninfluenced by His divine Presence and Indwelling Spirit.

There can be no doubt that Erskine was a pioneer in delivering the traditional theology from stultification. By his open and bold avowal that the Holy Spirit operates in the mind of man, as well as in the heart and will, he taught the Church larger views of God, and to be more hospitable to the many-sidedness of truth. It was a great and needful lesson for the theology of the time to learn, that the free Spirit of God cannot be forced into a theological mould for all time, that man's experience of God changes and grows and seeks a different

expression, and that the Holy Spirit is ever revealing Christ in new wonders of life, light, and love. He is too big for any age to grasp Him fully: but He contains life and salvation for every age and every individual. And the Spirit, whose chief function it is to bring home to the heart and conscience the redeeming mercy of God in Christ, is just as near, as real, and as powerful to day as in any time past.

IV.

The Christian Hope.Erskine's belief in the final restitution of all men.

During the last years of his life, Erskine became absorbed in one great truth viz- final restoration for all. It was not a conviction that suddenly seized <sup>him</sup> with advancing age, for it had been implicit in his conception of God from the beginning. For a long time he had been working steadily towards it. As he pondered more and more the supreme question of theology the Love of God- the idea of its final issue in Universalism took possession of his mind and heart, with ever increasing distinctness. And at last he felt it to be the only legitimate issue of the gospel. At his death he was busily engaged with these thoughts that had emerged in a long lifetime of close fellowship with God, with a view to presenting them as his last message to a sick and perishing world. The fragments were selected from his papers after his death, and were published under the title, "The Spiritual Order and other papers." in 1871. (App. xiii)

The first great question that Erskine deemed it necessary to consider in these thoughts on final destiny was the purpose of God with men as made known in the gospel. His matured conviction was that the Christian life is a divine education under a Holy and Loving God, who is our Father. He was convinced that the belief that we were created for education, is the only explanation of the endless varieties of human life- the only

approach to the solution of its mystery. " The Gospel proclaims" he says(on p.75. Spiritual Order.) " God's eternal and unchanging purpose for man, to raise him by education into fellowship with Himself, to make him a partaker in His own righteousness and His own blessedness."

Erskine proceeds to examine, in this section of 'the Purpose of God.' the traditional view of probation and the principles underlying it. As always it is in the light of God's Fatherhood and Saviourhood he sets the older conception and finds it to be inadequate. The revelation of God as a Father, he contended, necessarily involves the belief that education is the purpose for which we were created, and that probation must always be subservient to that end, and can never be itself the end. No education can go on without trial; but" we are tried that we may be educated, not educated that we may be tried."

The two views of human life, represented by probation and education, he held, are definitely opposed to each other in principle, and they lead to opposing views of the character of God and of the relation in which we stand to Him. The probation idea is criticised on the following grounds.

(I) It is narrow and legal, corresponding to the O.T. idea of the paramount relation of God to us- as the Judge. All that we can look for from God, according to this view, is strict impartiality. The Judge must allow the law to take its course, without any feelings of love or enmity. Any confidence, therefore, Erskine argues which I have in the award of a

righteous judge is in fact a confidence in myself—that I have right on my side and that it would be unrighteous to condemn me. But this condition is precisely the opposite in which we stand toward God, the Righteous Father; and if we are here simply to be tried, then man's position is really desperate. There is no escape from despair. Filial trust becomes absolutely impossible: for we can find no help from the character of God, who presents Himself primarily as impartial retributive justice.

(2) The idea of probation robs even the Gospel of its healing virtue: for it seems to suggest that the Gospel brings no unconditional blessing but only varies the form of our trial the final award being now suspended, not indeed on obedience and on a loving and righteous life, but on the answer to the question, are you a believer? This is a mistake, he considered, for it compelled us to seek the real ground of our confidence, not upon the Father's forgiving love revealed in the gift of His Son, but upon our performance of the task of believing.

(3) It had evil consequences, because in laying the stress on the effects of sin instead of on its inherent moral evil, the idea uppermost in men's minds was, how they might escape punishment, rather than desiring and hoping to become righteous. This conception, Erskine thought, was part of the wrong idea of regarding the life and death of Christ as a propitiation to divine justice, thro. which mercy was extended to the guilty, rather than a manifestation of that righteous

love which God desires to see in us. His conclusion is, that the idea of probation is actually opposed to the spirit of Christianity. There is nothing in it which answers to the announcement that God is the loving Father of all men.

On the other hand, and in contrast how<sup>immeasurably</sup> the conception of the Christian life gains in richness and fulness, when regarded as loving education, universal in direction, paternal in spirit, righteous in aim, spiritual in quality. It commends itself to the reason and conscience. It justifies our confidence in the beneficent aim of Providence. The belief is a continual call and encouragement to share the righteousness of God, because it is fitted to inspire that inextinguishable trust in Him, which is the right state of the creature, and the true basis of the Gospel of Christ. We are set free from the bondage of self-trust and fear when we are thus led to cast ourselves upon that loving purpose, as a refuge from all the evils which we feel within us, and to see in its unchangeableness a security for its triumph over everything which opposes it.

Erskine loved to dwell on Pauline passages that seemed to favour his cherished belief. He thought if we only keep hold of the great principle expressed in the 32nd. verse of Romans xi. many of the graver difficulties will disappear. Commenting on St. Paul's thought he goes on to say-(Spiritual Order, p.221.) " It seems to me that this idea of a spiritual education for all men, continued through all the stages of



their being until the righteousness of God is fulfilled in them, is the real meaning of all scripture, and the light which can alone guide us through these otherwise obscure chapters, and through all the obscure chapters of God's living dealings with ourselves and our fellow-men."

It is always Christian character- a character conformed to that of God, which Erskine believes to be the final purpose of God in all His dealings with men. But it must never be forgotten that it is the Father's discipline over His children. It is no relation between strangers. It is a family bond. The true nature and character of God throws light upon an otherwise perplexing scene- upon His government and providence. God who created us in love, and in whom all goodness dwells is always in touch with the spirits He has created. He does not remain outside of the world and human nature; but is ever communicating Himself, and ordering and controlling all events for wise and beneficent ends.

If we look on this world as a school of Christian character and on life as God's workshop for the creation of the soul, remembering that it is our Father who is working upon and in us, Erskine believed that the whole apparatus of life would be found admirably fitted for the purposes of love and righteousness. God's purpose is to make us blessed thro. righteousness: but that character can only be wrought out by trials and difficulties and afflictions. If this were practically remembered, every event, of whatever description

it be, would appear to us as an opportunity of exercising and strengthening some principle that contains in itself the elements of blessedness. " In everything give thanks for this( event, whether prosperous or adverse) is the will of God in Christ Jesus towards you." ( p.173.) It forms a part of that system of wisdom and love, of which the gift of Christ is the prominent feature and the great example. Christ was given to bring men near to God; and Erskine profoundly held that every part of the system of Providence is ordered with the same design. The Captain of our Salvation grew in the knowledge and love of God and of men through the sufferings He bore. He was our pattern in this as in all things. Not that we are to think of blessedness as something given as an arbitrary premium for having suffered,we are reminded by Erskine: but that the character which has been most exercised and refined by affliction contains a greater proportion of the constituent elements of true blessedness. Neither are we to suppose that afflictions necessarily lead to a blessed resultwithout faith. The effect in many cases is the reverse. But every event of life may teach us to exercise love to God or man, humility or heavenly mindedness.

Objections to this view are next considered. Is it possible to reconcile the aspect of the world with the existence of such a purpose? he asked. The spectacle of worldliness, he confessed,made this belief very difficult to hold. Multitudes outside the Christian pale, and the greater number within it do

not seem to offer high educational prospects. Many are taken up with merely selfish pursuits, with the desire to procure wealth or power or pleasure or ease. In the face of all this Erskine finds support for his belief in the inexhaustible patience of the Divine love. There is no evidence of haste in the natural world and we are clearly in the midst of a process. This reflection ought to prepare us for something analogous in the moral and spiritual world; so that at least we may be allowed to trust that "God who has taken untold ages for the formation of a bit of old red sandstone may not be limited to threescore years and ten for the perfecting of a human spirit." (Spiritual Order, p.53.)

A further answer is to be found in the testimony of the moral sense. The moral consciousness, as he often affirmed, is the distinguishing and characteristic feature of humanity. It clearly points to the purpose of God that it should finally change and control the whole man. God's normal method being one of gradualness and evolution, we surely ought not to judge only by what has yet been accomplished in man, but by the divine possibilities and capacities which are his God given endowment, and which under development may work tremendous changes. Erskine regarded this belief in a divine purpose of unchanging love for every man as an abiding element in the Christian faith. It is a complete confidence that God cares for men, and is administering the events of time and all human affairs for the good of His children. Though the education

is primarily that of the individual, it was Erskine's belief that God's ultimate object was to train and fit man to take his place in the spiritual society. The final goal of the divine purpose was a family of God.

The idea of education, advanced by Erskine, is today a commonplace in theology and philosophy. It is generally regarded as a more worthy conception than probation, and better fitted to interpret in their fullness and breadth, the divine purpose, the moral government of the world, and the meaning of human existence. Erskine rightly rejected the word probation as inadequate to set forth the experience of spiritual beings in their relation to the Creator and Redeemer. Perhaps he did less than justice to the older conception. But the gracious purpose of a Personal God, bearing that relation to His children, held the supreme place in his thoughts. He could not believe that we are given life merely that we may be tested and examined, and failing our coming up to the standard, put aside for ever. Such an idea was hardly conceivable in the relation of a human father to his child, though the latter might go astray and bring untold suffering upon himself and others. The father's prayers and love would pursue his child unceasingly, to the end that he might one day return to the good paths. God's testing then must be subservient to the higher ends of loving discipline and educative goodness.

The whole trend of Erskine's teaching on this subject receives remarkable confirmation from one of the greatest

modern authorities. Dr. Leckie, in his classic work on "the World to come and Final Destiny" says on p.98. "No man who is worthy to have a son says to himself, 'I will test this lad, and if he fails I will cast him out.' He knows that no failure or succession of failures, on the part of his son, can make an end of his obligation to do and desire the best for him. Such failure must, of course, entail suffering and penalty: but transcending all punishment, all retribution, is the necessity that is laid upon a father to strive to the last that his son may be saved."

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How did Erskine regard the traditional beliefs of punishment, retribution, and judgment?

Punishment, like retribution, he considered a necessary element in the moral life. Life is for ever testing men and conscience bringing them into judgment. These voices are true: they are voices from the depths of the soul: and they testify to the principles of holiness and righteousness that centre in God, and are the divine forces that uphold the majesty of the spiritual order. But punishment is remedial in its design, and all God's chastisements are stamped with His Holy and unchanging desire and purpose to purify and reform, that we may become partakers of His holiness.

The inner law of retribution, which condemns the wrong doer and insists on the sense of penalty being brought home to his heart, was also a great reality to Erskine. But he could not think of it as having no tendency to salvation or without promise of healing. Punishment and judgment served the higher ends of grace. Penal suffering was not done away by the sacrifice of Christ, but as we have seen, it was changed into sanctified sorrow. They could never be the final word, in a world in which God had revealed Himself as sovereign grace and goodness. It was Erskine's firm persuasion that the divine love would finally transmute all penalty and retribution into righteousness and peace for every man.

By what process of education and by what psychological means, this should at last be achieved for all, he does not answer. It was beyond him or any man- to fathom the powers of resistance of the human heart or the fathomless Love of the Divine Heart. But he took his stand on the latter. And it was deep seated belief in the Holy, Righteous, Loving Father that compelled him to believe, that at the last, every soul would make the right choice.

No doubt this is an imperfect view of punishment that resolves it into the desire to reclaim, or to use Erskine's own words- " the purpose of God, whether he punishes the sinner or remits the punishment, is always the merciful one of delivering him from sin, not that of carrying out the principle of retribution." (Spiritual order, p.73.)

Experience shows that there are certainly many punishments, which at once yield a corrective influence. But there are other elements in God's dealings with men which cannot be described in this way. There is the penalty attaching to sin- of inward deterioration in the heart and the dulling of conscience and the will's enfeeblement. There is also, as Erskine stoutly maintained, a self executing principle in conscience and penalty which is meant to vindicate Eternal righteousness, and which takes place whether it does good to the sinner or not. But the conclusion, at which Erskine arrived, is not necessarily impaired by his faults of omission. Many facts of the moral life certainly prevent us from affirming that all God's judgments are intended merely for the healing and education of men. But can it be reconciled with the goodness of God, any treatment by Him towards His children, which does not intend, in the last analysis, a gracious end of deliverance?

Erskine may have understated the principle of judgment but he did not undervalue it. He saw beyond it; that penalty did not exhaust the divine economy, and that the New Testament holds out to men a greater reality. The last word of the Gospel is not law or retribution but grace. The idea of judgment, as Prof. Leckie declares in his great work already mentioned, fails to suggest or express the highest thing in the religion of Christ: and when it is conceived as the last message, it quite definitely bears a legal aspect and is

concerned with retribution and rewards. It was no small service which Erskine rendered to his day and generation to put in the forefront of theological thought, the supreme message of the Gospel. Grace does not lower the demands of the law, for the law is of God. But the grievous mistake had been to forget that the Lawgiver is the Gracious and Heavenly Father. The Father comes first in the order of nature, just as a child loves its parent first without knowing how or why.

St. Paul's great message, as Erskine admirably showed in his exposition of the Epistle to the Romans in these Fragments, was to declare the superiority of the Gospel or Grace over the law, though the law comes in and has its place. It is to be noted that Erskine's interpretation of the mind and heart of St. Paul is remarkably sane and enlightened. He refused to accept the crude views that had been foisted on to the teaching of the Apostle by the traditional theology. He examined the supposed scriptural classic for the doctrine of reprobation in Rom. ix-xi. and showed that it was at complete variance with the thought of St. Paul. The Apostle was wrestling with the problem raised by Israel's rejection of Christ; but even in this difficult passage, it is not the bleak and paralysing view of election but the noble one of service that prevails and sends him forward to seize the hope " that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved." This then, according to St. Paul, Erskine said, is the future



history of the rebrobrates- the rejected, the lost- and he winds up his argument with that emphatic word, " For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all."

There are some magnificent passages in this fragment of exposition of St. Paul's thoughts, and especially of the views and tendencies that undoubtedly point towards Universalism. In Erskine's view the whole argument of the Epistle marches forward to the triumph of grace and limitless hope for all. He writes, in the "Spiritual Order" p.226., " The triumphant feeling of the writer seems to reach the culminating point- at which his far- seeing hope seems to overlook all intervening darkness, and to revel in the contemplation of a final result of universal blessedness."

Many modern theologians are impressed with St. Paul's Universalistic hopes and beliefs, although they would not go so far as Erskine in pressing them. For there is another side to them. Prof. Leckie in the work already quoted, goes a long distance with Erskine. He recognises that there is a universal strain in St. Paul's message, which indicates a steadily growing faith in the Love of God for all mankind, and in the limitless sweep of that Kingdom of Life which was to be established thro. Jesus Christ. It is his considered view that a good case can be made out that St. Paul believed in the final salvation of all souls.

Dr. C.H.Dodd in his masterly analysis and interpretation of the Epistle to the Romans, uses equally strong words entirely in line with Erskine's view. In his examination of the passage, Rom.xi., he concludes with these words- " The final aim of that purpose is a state in which God's mercy is as universally effective as sin has been. In other words, it is the will of God that all mankind shall ultimately be saved." ( p.183. Ep. to the Romans.) He goes on to say that it has been thought incredible that St. Paul should have committed himself to such an absolute 'universalism.' Attempts have been made to water it down. " But if we look at the trend of the discussion, we observe that the arguments by which Paul asserts the final salvation of Israel are equally valid( in fact are valid only) if they are applied to mankind at large." The conclusion to which he is led on this important subject, as a modern scholar, is very impressive as a complete corroboration of Erskine's thought. " If we really believe in One God, and believe that Jesus Christ, in what He was and what He did, truly shows us what God's character and His attitude to men are like, then it is very difficult to think ourselves out of the belief that somehow His love will find a way of bringing all men into unity with Him." ( p.186.)

What has Erskine to say about Christ's teaching on this subject? He recognised that most people in the country felt strongly that his views and arguments were met and overturned by the solemn words of our Lord in the 25th. chap. of Matthew, and by other passages of like import. How does he explain the meaning of *αἰώνιος*? " I understand that awful scene represented in Matthew, as declaring the certainty of the connection between sin and misery, but not as a finality." ( Letters Vol.ii. p.240.) He disclaimed the popular view that *αἰώνιος* has principally a time significance. It refers primarily, he said, to man's essential or spiritual state, and not to time, either finite or infinite: so that he would have agreed with Westcott( Epistles of St. John-p.215.) that Eternal life is not an endless duration of being in time, but being of which time is not a measure. Even allowing a time reference as its secondary meaning, it denotes at the most aduration of unmeasured length, with no end in sight.

Whether Erskine was right in his contention is a mute point. Certainly many competent scholars are with him; but Prof. H.R.Mac<sup>K</sup>intosh may be taken as representing many others when he says:- " Attempts - - - - to evacuate the word eternal of its natural meaning have come to nothing." ( Immortality and the Future, p.204.) However, since there exists such decided cleavage among authorities, the words of Prof. Leckie assume very great significance. " Where such difference of opinion exists, there must be room for doubt." (Note p.348.)

and the doubt should be on the side of Christian charity. In any case it would be perilous to rest such an issue upon the meaning of a word, or even upon scattered sayings of our Lord, which are often coloured with figurative language, of which we cannot even be sure that they are His actual words.

No doubt Erskine failed to give this truth a firm and unassailable basis ( who can?) but he grounded it upon the broad evangelical truth of the New Testament. He centred his hope for all upon the greatness of the Redeemer's Love, which was a truth so central and living in his own experience, that it was unbelievable it should fail to touch a responsive chord in every human being, later if not sooner. His religious faith was the anchor of his soul, sure and steadfast, taking hold within the veil. Love cannot fail. " The Shepherd goeth after that which is lost until He finds it."

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Summing up Erskine's Christian optimism, we may say that his thoughts on Final Restoration were pivoted on two main positions. They were really inseparable in experience but we may separate them for exposition.

1. The Righteousness of God
2. The Love of God.

#### I. The Divine Righteousness.

With Erskine the emphasis is hardly more on

the one than the other. The Love is always a Holy Love. The Father is always a Righteous Father. But the righteousness is taken first, because the proclaimers of universalistic beliefs have often been charged, not without cause, with weakening the conception of God, and the seriousness of sin and life, by encouraging an indolent security.

Erskine is far removed from any such charge. There was no levity in his composition or in anything he wrote. There is no cheapening of the stern demands of truth or any failure to appreciate the severity of love. He saw life ever *sub specie aeternitatis* and built on the holiness and righteousness of the Father, not on mere benevolence alone.

The Spectator ( June, 1871. p.768.) in an appreciation of Erskine's life and influence as a teacher specially fitted for his time, draws attention to this distinguishing feature in his thinking on this great theme. " What we specially welcome in this little volume is a combination of two feelings we have never seen combined in any religious book before- the absolute conviction of ultimate blessedness for every human soul, and the sense that it is quite impossible for human beings to exaggerate God's horror of sin."

McLeod Campbell, in a letter to his son (July 1871. Vol.ii. Memorials.) remarks in reference to the above article- " I am thankful to see the Spectator drawing attention so emphatically to the wide difference between this Volume and ordinary /

ordinary arguments for Universalism, in the deep sense of the Divine condemnation of sin which possessed Mr. Erskine."

It can therefore be confidently asserted, that no man ever realised with deeper insight and conviction the exceeding sinfulness of sin. To quote his own words-( Spiritual Order. p.66.) " Whilst we reject this false conception of the Divine purpose, do we mean to say that man can ever over-estimate God's hatred of evil? Assuredly not. I would even say that the man who regards God simply as a just Judge, and who is by that consideration urged to a continual effort after righteousness(though it is certain that whilst ignoring God's Fatherly relation to him he never can attain to righteousness and must be always in unrest) is doubtless in a higher moral condition than the man who allows his idea of God's fatherly relation to lower his idea of God's holiness and abhorrence of sin."

If then Erskine believed in the final defeat of evil, it was not because he underestimated the loss and blight caused by it. He would not have said that evil has only a negative existence; but he held that goodness is stronger than its opposite. God, being supremely good and righteous, would not withhold His hand from the severest measures to accomplish sin's overthrow; but they would be the instruments of His love. Every punishment and severity had a redemptive significance. God would fail if the ends of goodness and righteousness were not served by life's discipline, and that thought Erskine could not entertain.

## 2. The Divine Love.

It was also inconceivable to Erskine that along the line of the Love of God there should be final defeat. To admit the thought that the creative and redemptive love of the Heavenly Father in Christ, could fail in the case of any human being whom He created was a conception for which he could find no room in his mind and heart. He thought it would destroy the ground of Christian belief and hope if entertained, and take away the greatest stay and support which the struggling faith of man possessed viz- the unshakeable conviction, that all signs and appearances to the contrary and the temporary success of evil, the final victory of righteousness, truth, and love, can never be in doubt. We must firmly believe, he said, if we are not to be swept away by the dark and dismal view of things selfish and evil, that in the long last the 'love of God will triumph over the dying struggles of the human rebellion.'

This belief was rooted in the greatness of God's love, as we have already noted. But the work of Christ was an essential part of the belief. The love of God the Father flowed out to men in the Redeemer, calling for a corresponding quality and measure of love to Him from them. God had given good ground to men to believe in His wisdom and love; and faith was just man answering to the Saviour's call, responding more and more to Love's deathless appeal. Nothing stood

in the way to any man entering into this gracious relationship, except the assertion of his self-will. But God would never override the freedom of the will: however it was not so absolute as to permit of eternal persistence in sin. God's purpose would certainly be effective in the case of every soul, but this not thro. force of any kind, but by the persuasive ministries of His grace in Christ. Though God is essentially and eternally a Father- a God of mercy and goodness and blessing- His goodness cannot bless us until we yield our hearts to Him. This transformation of heart, he insisted, is the great object of all God's dealings with us, an object from which He will never desist, by the use of all His infinite means, in this and in every stage of our being, until it is accomplished.

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Erskine was supremely a pioneer in this field and vastly enriched the thoughts of men in their outlook on final destiny: perhaps it was his greatest contribution to Scottish theology. He initiated a movement, which has steadily gathered momentum, to regard God as nearer and more tender to His creation than the Calvinism of his day permitted. At a time when hope was largely crushed by a dark and sinister conception of the Divine Being and His purposes to men: when the retributive aspect of His rule and character nearly submerged the gracious and redeeming side, Erskine courageously set in the forefront of his teaching, the message of His sovereign love and grace. And when



few thought hopefully of a proportion of mankind, or had their hopes strangled at the birth by the picture of the dread prison which awaited the souls of many whom God had abandoned to the consequences of their sins, Erskine dared to hope, and to make known his hope to the world. He has been joined by a steady and increasing stream of Christian thinkers. A hundred years ago, when first these thoughts were shaping themselves in his heart, and were being set forth in the 'Unconditional Freeness', he was a revolutionary, a heretic, and a proclaimed rationalist: but many of his treasured convictions have entered into our Christian thinking and are the common stock of our theological beliefs to day.

That dark and narrow apprehensions of the love of God in Christ generally prevailed in Erskine's day, admits of no doubt. (~~App.~~) Dr. Ralph Wardlaw, a prominent theologian of the time, wrote two essays on the 'extent of the Atonement and universal pardon' in reply to Erskine's new ideas. Stirred with deep indignation at the trend of Erskine's teaching on the Universal love of God, he expressed the view that his sentiments were pregnant with mischief, although his biographer states- that he was attracted by many fine ideas in the genius of Erskine. It is clear from much which he has to say in this work, (Essay on the extent of the Atonement, pp 318 that Erskine's thinking on the love of God had greatly disturbed the theology of all the schools in Scotland, and he says:- " I wish the abettors of that system to consider, how

unlike in one respect to the style of the New Testament, is the entire strain of their addresses, in that they dwell so exclusively on the motives that are derived from love, and leave out of use such as have their source in fear."

As late in the century as 1879, the principles of fear and eternal punishment occupied an important place in theological exposition. Dr. John Cairns, leader of the U.P. Church published in that year in the Catholic Presbyterian his decided opposition to the new heresy. At the same time testimony is borne to the steady progress which Erskine's more enlightened views had made in the country. "However mysterious and awful" he writes, "the doctrine of future punishment as we have hitherto held it, we should in breaking with it, cast away one of the mightiest instruments in dealing with the souls of men." Six years later, in a work (Immortality: a clerical Symposium. 1885.) the same author lays it down, "While far from insensible to the moral difficulties connected with the serious and awful view as to penalty without end, which I am constrained by fidelity to scripture to hold, I cannot exclude this great mystery of Christianity from its teaching."

Such beliefs, Erskine had long considered, belonged to an outworn tradition, which the Christian experience had left behind; they did not owe their validity to the true genius of Christianity; nor did they answer to the great principles of the gospel. Whence did Erskine derive his hopeful views for the future of sinners beyond the gates of death? He studied

the New Testament and found Christ's love the centre of it, revealing the boundless goodness of God the Father; and he found the witness in his own heart. His view was evangelical to the core. It was derived from the Atoning work of the Saviour, a love that endured the Cross to recover and save all men. This, not fear was the mighty instrument which God had used to draw the erring home to himself. It was the most powerful excitement to gratitude, to the good life, and to man's salvation. No doubt God used other means and motives to awaken the human soul from the sleep of sin and death; but the mightiest was the unveiling of the merciful purpose that dwelt in the heart of the Eternal Being. A redemption so great, costly, and comprehensive must have an end commensurate with its greatness, and Christ one day see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied with the ingathering of all souls to God the Father. Any other conclusion to this wonderful gospel was incredible in Erskine's inmost being. He built his hope for the final restitution of all to the scale of Christ's infinite love.

A great change has come over the Christian outlook upon the future life since Erskine's day. The theologian of to day works in a different atmosphere, in which the moral sense is finer, the ideals of punishment are higher and purer, and a deeper insight into the intrinsic nature of reality is manifest, created by men like Erskine who were informed with the true spirit of Christianity. Larger

conceptions of the Divine love prevail. There has been a steady alteration in the perspective of doctrine, both as declared from the pulpit and willingly accepted in the pew. It is incredible that the dark and gloomy teaching that overshadowed religion in Scotland a century ago, and which was the regular fare of the people, even from good and saintly divines, should be voiced to day. Orthodoxy no longer asks us to believe in an endless Hell. The moral sense rejects it and it is inconceivable to the reason which believes in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prof. H.R.Mackintosh in his work on "Immortality and the Future" 1915. p.197, says- " The authority of New Testament teaching is spiritual, not mediated by proof texts or imposed on faith as if by statute. - - - If at this moment a frank and confidential plebiscite of the English speaking ministry were taken, the likelihood is that a considerable majority would adhere to Universalism. They may no doubt shrink from it as a dogma, but they would cherish it privately as at least a hope." The same theologian in another place of this work, draws attention to the fact, that Erskine's universalistic beliefs inspired him to further zeal in Evangelism. And it can be truly said that the hope he cherished for all opened up no easy prospect. It heightened rather than lowered the ethical significance of life, and the urgency of the present moment. In this connection, some words of Dr. W.N. Clarke from his work ' Outline of Christian Theology' p.480. are worth quoting:- " The most serious

dangers in connection with thought upon future destiny do not spring from belief in the largeness of Divine grace. They spring from the idea that salvation is something else than transformation into the likeness of the good God. Men think that to be saved is to be snatched out of the suffering that is due to their sins, and be brought to everlasting safety; and in such a thought there is deep moral danger."

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Three views have been held upon the important subject of the fate of sinners.

I. Everlasting Punishment.

The impenitent shall go into everlasting punishment. This was the orthodox belief of Erskine's day. It was supposed to be perfectly clear, because it was supported by a reading of the plain words and truths of scripture. But there are grave doubts that it is so plain as once appeared. The great difficulty of this view of punishment is its acceptance of sin as an ultimate fact. We must admit that evil defeats God.

2. Conditional Immortality.

The impenitent will receive another chance: which if it be not taken, will determine their future. When all has been done, and impenitence remains, the last spark of

spiritual life then dies to ashes: and those who persist in evil will be allowed to pass out of existence. Punishment, in this view, is conceived in terms of loss not of suffering as in the first.

This conception also claims scripture for its support. It has the advantage of seeming to harmonise the final loss of some, with the triumph of God's kingdom in a spiritual society of Christlike men, though somewhat attenuated. One serious difficulty about Conditional Immortality is- it limits the power of God's love; and, as in the first view though in a different way, sin defeats God.

### 3. Final Restoration. the belief of Erskine.

Erskine's hope that all will be saved was not easily won. In many ways, as we have seen, he was drawn in the opposite direction; and his own profound insight into the nature of sin in the heart of man, and its power to deceive and enthrall the soul, made the choice harder for him than most. He did not take the step lightly: for even the friends, who shared with him the deepest thoughts on life and religion, drew back from this last step. McLeod Campbell refused to go so far. Principal Shairp thought he did not allow enough for the resistive power of the human will, even to the Infinite Love of God. Dr. Chalmers, when he perceived the drift of the thought towards Universalism, became

lukewarm. How did Erskine come to this conclusion? It was thro. his own personality and by experimental Knowledge of the divine love. Few indeed are better qualified to speak on such grave issues, than he <sup>who</sup> had experienced the Saviour's love with such power, and walked daily in close communion with God: of whom McLeod Campbell always spoke in tones of deepest reverence, and said ( Memorials. Vol.ii. p.150.) " I meet in no one the same full realisation of the Gift of God as Eternal Life- the life of Christ to be our life- that I see in Erskine" of whom Scott said, " When I think of Thomas Erskine, I think of God.": and of whom Dean Stanley wrote- " To many Erskine was a more direct link with the unseen world than any other that had crossed their path." (*History of the Scottish Church 1817-16*)

Erskine rejected the traditional theology, because he felt, it gave a conception of God which could not be reconciled with the spiritual, universal, reasonable teaching of Christ, and the witness of the Spirit in his own heart. For the same reason he rejected the belief in an Everlasting Hell. To day few theologians or even believers could be found to subscribe to the belief in the existence of a realm to which a wrathful Deity condemns men to suffer endlessly as a fit reward for the evil they have done on the earth.

Incredible as it is to us to day, such methods of advancing religion were common in Scotland in Erskine's day and long after it. Even the gentle divine and author of the Fourfold State, Boston, had spoken of the redeemed in

Heaven as 'rejoicing over the tortures of the damned  
 - - - God will not pity them, but laugh at their calamity.'  
 ( Fourfold State. iv.6.) And the godly McCheyne, in Dundee,  
 close to Erskine's ear, was rousing congregations by his  
 pictures of the infernal regions. " What good will<sup>4</sup> do you in  
 hell that you know all the sciences in the world: do you not  
 know that your very knowledge will be turned into an instrument  
 of torture in hell?" ( McCheyne's Memoirs. p. 303.) Similar  
 passages( p.321.) of awful doom foreshadow the future state of  
 the unconverted and are even applied to little children.  
 ( App. xiv. )

Such examples show the prevalence of the old belief  
 in Eternal Punishment lasting into the 19th. century. Erskine's  
 show  
 views how well and truly he anticipated the modern attitude in  
 its dislike and condemnation of such ways of advancing Christian  
 truth. The public teaching of the Christian religion no longer  
 recognises such methods. The representation of such a  
 materialistic God has power no longer to influence the mind and  
 heart. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Erskine also  
 anticipated the wider views which science and psychology have  
 disseminated in regard to heredity and environment and the  
 social inheritance as affecting the disposition, choice, and  
 chance of human beings. The question of responsibility and of  
 human guilt is not so clear cut and simple as it once appeared.



The Letters also contain important evidence of the Universalistic views which Erskine held from an early period of his life, and their characteristic trend. By citing a few of them we shall be led to see, that there is no contrast in his last thoughts with earlier ones: nothing to suggest mental decay or a change induced by the declining weakness of age.

In letters from Geneva (1839.) Vol.I. pp. 346. to his sister, he refers to a friend who was perplexed with the future condition of those who die at a distance from God. " I told her frankly what I hoped for all men. She told me that she sometimes entertained that hope, but that she could not find it in the Bible, yet she thought there could be no real gospel without it. I think so too- the unending Love of God. "

Writing to Capt. Paterson in the same year, Vol. I. p.353. a letter of consolation, he says:- " My belief in the continuation of spiritual education beyond this life relieves me at all events from the agonising thought that 26 years of negligence are to fix the eternal condition of the soul for good or evil."

To Madame Forel, one of his continental friends who was also an intimate friend of Vinet, he writes under letter dated April 1848- (Vol. II. pp.59.) " The hope of final restoration, even of those who are now wandering farthest from

God, is to me a most precious hope. It is a hope also in perfect harmony with the great principle that we must eat of the fruit of our doings, for I believe that no mortal being can ever rise out of misery, except by rising out of sin, and that none can rise out of sin except by partaking of Christ's death."

The letters to many friends round the year 1864 contain little else than his thoughts on limitless hope for all. Perhaps the best and clearest exposition from the Letters is in his correspondence with Mr. Craig, the author of final salvation. ( Vol. II. pp. 237.) All his favourite ideas are found here- conscience, righteousness, education, hope for the sinful, argued with his wonted power. But in the middle of the argument, he passes from logic and exegesis as though realising their insufficiency, to the simplest and most beautiful illustration that could touch the heart.

The passage is too long to quote. It often appears in the writings. It is the love of the human parent for its child- a love that never ceases to yearn and to carry it on his heart, even when the child wanders far into sin and trouble and which does not cease with the child's life. This human love, the best thing we know on earth, is surely but a faint reflection of the love of the Heavenly Father.

" Then, can we suppose that the Father of the spirits of all flesh will throw off the care for the souls of

His children when they leave this world, because they have, during their stay here, resisted His efforts to make them righteous? The supposition seems monstrous and incredible, and could not be acquiesced in by any human being, were it not for certain false ideas of God's righteousness and justice."

This letter is further remarkable, as showing how completely Erskine had thrown off all hesitancy and doubt about the final doom of the lost. His words ring with conviction and solemn protest against any narrowing of God's fathomless love in Christ. "When I think of God making a creature of such capacities, it seems to me almost blasphemous to suppose that He will throw it from Him into everlasting darkness."

Further on he reiterates his unfaltering belief in the principle of divine education- that it was thro. his understanding of it as God's manifest way and purpose with men, he was helped to lay hold of this sublime hope.

"We cannot believe that the education is to terminate with this life, considering that there is so large a proportion of the human race who die in infancy, and of those who survive that period there are so many who can scarcely be said to receive any education at all, and that so few- not one in a million- appear to benefit by their education." ( p. 242. Vol. II. Letters.)

On p. 243 he makes the following confident affirmation-  
 " I cannot believe that any human being can be beyond the reach of God's grace and the sanctifying power of His Spirit. Is not the love revealed in Jesus Christ a love unlimited, unbounded, which will not leave anything undone which love could desire?" It was surely nothing else than the complete and universal triumph of that love which Paul was contemplating when he cried out, " Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! "

The letter concludes with strong words, which may be taken as Erskine's confession of faith. ( p.244.)

" And as this blessed faith helps me to love God and trust him for myself, so it helps me to love my fellow creature because it assures me that, however debased and unloveable they may be at present, yet the time is coming when they shall all be living members of Christ's body, partakers in the holiness and beauty and blessedness of their Lord."

Perhaps there never was a stronger illustration of the wish being father to the thought than in Erskine's hopeful beliefs for all. It is often noticeable in his teaching that the desires and needs of the heart are too much used as proof of the substantial reality which shall satisfy them.

No criticism, however, can detract from the living message which he uttered in these and all his other beliefs. All Christian thought is tending, to day, towards enlargement

of hope for the spiritual welfare of humanity, and the tendency springs largely from the adequate conception of God which Erskine proclaimed, with unceasing urgency against the dominant beliefs of his day.

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V. Some Reflections on Erskine's Universalism.

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Erskine set men to re-think the Christian position in regard to this question of fundamental importance. He challenged theologians to re-examine the grounds upon which the traditional doctrine rested.

Was there a ground of hope for all men or did the Christian Revelation limit the chance for the great majority at the gates of death, and set the finality of doom upon their fate? Did it bear consistency with the conception of the Holy and Loving Father and was it in harmony with reason, conscience and the facts of life? Did it bear out the spirit of the Gospel? Was not the Christ of Mercy and Love unequally yoked to such a dark conclusion?

Such were some of the questions which Erskine forced the theologians of his day to face and answer. He himself faced them with steady courage, fearless honesty, and a deep seated love; and he reached the vision of absolute Universalism, not without deep stress of spirit and a nature that perceived the consequences.

Erskine did not clear away the difficulties that beset this great and baffling question; but he opened a path for further development in the theology of the future, and laid down the true lines along which fruitful advance could be expected. His attitude was both honest and prophetic.

Christian faith cannot leave this question in the region of doubt and mystification. As Erskine was quick to perceive, alone in his day, the problem of final destiny is a vital part and issue of the great principles of the Christian religion; and the expectations built upon it are of the utmost speculative importance, and of the most intimate practical concern to everybody.

The question has been hedged about by silence and agnosticism; but that position is hopelessly unsatisfactory. For silence speaks. "Supprimer les questions n'est pas y répondre.", as a famous Frenchman once said. Nor will it avail to day to stress pedantically some words of scripture, as Dr. Ralph Wardlaw attempted in his Essay against Erskine, holding that the Pauline expression "all mankind" meant "mankind as a whole" and did not carry the full significance of "all individual men." The esoteric view is also far below the gravity which the subject demands of the theologian.

Erskine's attitude is much to be preferred, as an honest attempt to set the problem of the Last Things in the light of everything men have known and experienced of God, by Revelation and in the heart and conscience, as the Universal Father, with love streaming forth from Him to the Divine Son, who in answering love takes upon Himself the Heavenly mission of bringing redemption to the whole human race. Erskine's hope for all, as for each of us, was drawn from his faith in God. He saw no reason to cherish a hope for any, that did not

include the hope of all, for it depended on the sovereign grace of God in Christ. That love was so great a reality to Erskine, that his spirit was such that as one of a saved minority he could find no peace in Heaven.

It has been contended that he carried the principle of love too far, and set too little store by the principle of fear. It will be pointed out, in our final appreciation and criticism, that he did not fully appreciate the historic witness of the older Theology, as standing for something of permanent worth in the Christian faith. But surely if the balance has never been perfectly struck, unless in the life of Christ, he has got hold of immeasurably the more important. For as Dr. Leckie remarks in the concluding words of his chapter on Universal Restoration, (The World to come and Final Destiny: p. 290.) "The things that finally abide in the light of the face of Christ are not fear and pain and death, but faith and hope and love."

No doubt Erskine ventured on a dogmatic affirmation which Christian experience and the present facts of life cannot yet be said to justify, and which awaits further light. That help may be looked for, so far as present knowledge can help us, in any fresh light bearing upon the actual and authentic words of Christ, and in waiting humbly on God, to know more fully His mind and Will under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The solution, it cannot be said, is within sight.



But the theological outlook is immeasurably more hopeful and catholic since Erskine's day for the final good of all. When the discords vanish into one harmonious belief, it will ever be associated with Erskine's brave pioneer work, who put foremost in his teaching the boundless love of God, and gave a clear and unequivocal answer to the questioning spirit for light, and marked out the true road of advance in the future.

It can be truthfully claimed that Erskine has laid under a great debt all succeeding theologians who have to think and write on the final destiny of man, and who have sought a unified view of Christian truth. Two demands he addressed to the theological conscience, which it has been compelled to recognise as axiomatic in any view of man's future state.

Firstly: It must give the supreme place to, and take for its guide, the sublime and distinctive truth of the Gospel- God's redeeming purpose for all mankind thro. Jesus Christ His Son.

Secondly: It must interpret the reality of retribution, to which the conscience bears witness, in such a way as never to minimise the first message of revealed Christian truth viz- God's avowed purpose in Christ to reconcile all men unto Himself

From the evangelical Christian standpoint, the view we take of the impenitent's fate cannot be too charitable, provided it be true charity, i.e. moral and not sentimental; and it must never endanger the seriousness of living and the reality of the moral life. From that danger Erskine is entirely free. To suggest that he preached an unethical

Universalism or that he countenanced the view, often ascribed to Universalistic doctrines, that the final good is 'bound to come to us, unstriven for, in the course of things whether we choose or not', would be a travesty of his whole teaching, in which is set on nearly every page the momentous nature of every choice between good and evil, in the here and hereafter.

Erskine's final hope for all does not envisage an easy road for any. He speaks of a long long period of cleansing to endure as long as the soul clings to a vestige of self. The nature or condition of Eternal Life, he often indicates as being in his view, to know God in Christ more and more, and to grow into His likeness. The Heavenly life is not static but a progressive realisation of the Divine love and righteousness. Hell is a dread reality though it is spiritualised. There is loss and suffering so long as evil is followed, the longer sin continues, the more difficult and arduous will be the road of recovery.

Erskine was no mere theoretical thinker. Every religious question for him carried a great practical issue, and bore down upon daily living. The question arose, and arises for us to day with even greater force- is the larger conception and hope of the Kingdom of God, which Erskine proclaimed, likely to prove a feebler motive in winning men to the Father, than the narrower one against which he contended? Is not the most powerful

powerful motive or appeal addressed to the erring will of man and likely to influence his heart and conscience for good, the one which he set in the forefront of his message viz:- the greatness of God's love in Christ to all and the belief that the cause for which He gave Himself would finally and completely triumph?

The modern world, in fact, has turned away from the emphasis of the traditional Theology, and has confirmed the prophetic vision of Erskine. The strength of the Gospel is being recognised more and more to lie in its great and all embracing missionary appeal, in its far flung message of God's sovereign love to the whole world. As Dr. Sydney Cave says, in his work on "The Doctrines of the Christian Faith" p.279. " Hell's terrors and Heaven's glories have alike ceased to impress those whose faith in God is weak."

In the light of this trend, and of a growing experience of God's love to men, and of all Erskine did to point the Church to wider horizons of the divine love, we may estimate the greatness of his work and the significance of his life for religion in our land, and especially for this vital and vitalising belief and hope which was wrapped up in a noble conception of God and experience of His boundless grace in Christ. The effect of Erskine's contribution has been immensely to enlarge men's estimate of the spiritual capacity of mankind.

Whatever views we may hold in theory on this supremely important and difficult subject, it can be said with all certainty that in practise, the more widely our hope extends the better we shall be enabled to fulfil our Christian task and to set forward the universal Kingdom of Christ, to which the New Testament and generations of Christian hearts look hopefully forward, building their confidence on the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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VI.

The influence of Erskine's writings, direct and indirect, upon the progress of Theology in Scotland, in the different Churches and among the people.

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While Erskine's views were spreading, remarkable changes were taking place in their theological outlook among the different Churches. Conscience was bringing individuals into collision with the accepted creeds, and new forces were at work to change the narrow outlook of the past. These were felt in the National Church and Free Church, and as powerfully in the Congregational, the Secession, the Evangelical Union, and the United Presbyterian.

One of the significant factors in bringing about a wider outlook was undoubtedly Thomas Erskine and his writings. His influence was not of the violent and revolutionary kind, but worked quietly like the seed cast into the ground.

In 1841 Scottish Theology was disturbed with what is known as the Atonement Controversy. Its chief theatre was the United Secession Church, though it drew into it the Congregational Church. This important theological struggle took its rise in connection with certain doctrinal beliefs of the Rev. James Morison. The battle raged round many points; but its crux was Morison that sponsored the views to which Erskine had given utterance, on the universal nature of the Atonement- a belief, he said, which had first given peace to his own mind. Morison was finally

deposed, and founded the Evangelical Union Church.

In sympathy with those of the Secession Church who had felt the breath of Erskine's more gracious teaching, was to be added a section of the Congregational Church. They in turn found themselves no longer able to adhere to the limited Calvinistic doctrine of their Church on the efficacy and scope of Christ's Atoning death. They felt, with their deposed brethren of the Secession Church, that the Gospel of the grace of God was obscured both in its greatness and simplicity, by such unwarranted teaching.

The refusal of the privilege of the Sacrament to Erskine in the Congregational Church in Dundee precipitated a break; and the more conservative section, who were not prepared to go as far as Erskine, remained; whereas others, in deep sympathy with his views and aims, were expelled, and found a refuge in, and joined themselves to, the Morisonians.

In an estimate of the lessons and truths to be gleaned from this forgotten controversy, Dr. John Cairns says in his "Memoir of Dr. John Brown" p.255:- " Upon the whole it may be affirmed that the controversy has, by its remote, as well as its direct impression, exerted a valuable influence in liberalising the tone of Scottish Theology."

A further development of liberal thought showed itself within the Secession, and the Relief Churches came together and their breaches were healed in the historic United Presbyterian Church in 1847.

Nearly 30 years afterward, dissatisfaction with the theological position declared itself further, when Fergus Ferguson and David Macrae approached the supreme court to have the doctrinal standards revised. Ferguson's views were- that the confessional theology was deficient and inadequate in the treatment of God, the universe and man, Christ, the Church, and the Bible. Macrae concentrated his attack upon the dogma of Everlasting Punishment: that it was inconsistent with an honest belief in the merciful character of God, and the Church was bound to renounce it. He claimed freedom to hold and teach the theory of Conditional Immortality and Universal Restoration.

Macrae was declared no longer a minister of the U.P. Church. But not long afterward that Church passed a Declaratory Act by which was given to the ministry and elders the freedom sought, certain subjects being specified in regard to which the teaching of the Confession of Faith is inadequate. The subjects mentioned were- the Love of God for all mankind, predestination, total depravity, the destiny of the heathen and of infants, the Headship of Christ.

It is worthy of note that the weaknesses which Ferguson and Macrae exposed in the standards, were essentially those which Erskine had assailed viz:- the nature and character of God and the destiny of the passed over. Thus the leaven was at work and the cause of enlightened and progressive Christianity was advancing.

Contemporary with Erskine and in close contact with his mind and spirit was his near neighbour, Rev. George Gilfillan of School Wynd Church, Dundee. In 1850 he writes- " I spent a forenoon lately with Thos. Erskine and Thos. Carlyle on the brink of the German ocean, walking out from Linlathen." His biographer tells us that he taught the Fatherhood of God long before it was a common and popular theme in the U.P. Church, and was one of the first to arouse the attention of thoughtful men to the aspersion cast upon the character of God by such dogmas as those of reprobation, the damnation of infants, and the doom of the heathen. Who can doubt, that in these intimate talks and walks, there was confirmed if not formed in his heart the wider and more gracious views of God's character and purposes which he so winningly set forth?

Following these liberal tendencies, there appeared in 1880 a volume of sermons of a very influential nature, contributed by leading preachers and professors, entitled ' Scotch Sermons.' In a brief preface their purpose is set forth. " They are the work of those whose hope for the future lies, not in ecclesiastical organisation, but in a profounder apprehension of the essential ideas of Christianity."

An examination of these representative views from leading exponents of Christian truth in Scotland reveals nothing more clearly than this- that they bear the impress of the mind and thoughts of Erskine uttered nearly 50 years before

Their standpoint is the one which he declared in



his first book, 'The Internal Evidence.' viz:- the discovery of the vital elements of the Christian Revelation and its truths in harmony with the needs of humanity. The sermons insist on the necessity of a subjective experience of the Gospel. "The sphere of religion is spiritual" says one writer, "We become religious, in greater or less degree, as our spirits are quickened into higher life by contact with the Divine Spirit, and as we intelligently realise this quickening and put forth the energy it imparts."

Another of Erskine's fundamental conceptions- the character of God- finds fresh and forceful expression in many of the sermons of this volume. One divine says (Rev. W.L. McFarlan. XI. pp. 195; and XII. pp. 219.) that the character of God has been warped by the political or imperial conception given to it and maintained in Scottish Theology for centuries. It is only during the last quarter of a century that the theological mind of Scotland, has to any great extent, risen above this conception of Divine imperialism; but it is shaking off the fetters by which these have sought to bind it. The religion of Jesus Christ has been too long identified with adherence to intellectual propositions. But we must demand in the interests of vital Christianity, that Theology shall no longer be substituted for religion. We plead for greater catholicity of spirit- greater catholicity in Theology.'

In another sermon Principal Story gives his full support and blessing.

blessing to the wider truth and clearer light which Erskine brought in regard to authority and the Inner Light or Spirit of Truth. In words which almost reproduce the very language of Erskine he says:- " the external authority is but the stamp upon the coin. The stamp may be a forgery. The internal evidence is the fine gold of which the true coin is made, and which stamped or unstamped, is of the same intrinsic and unalterable value. We must learn to act on the principle, that authority has no power over you, except so far as it has its witness in itself; except in so far as your conscience acknowledges it as just, right, and true." (Scotch Sermons: pp. 373-5.)

The sermons also throw light upon the influence of Erskine's **eschatological beliefs**. Nothing is more arresting in them than the trend of a more charitable outlook for all men. The darkness of extreme Calvinistic teaching on a material hell is being steadily displaced with the brightness and peace of God's mercy. It is held by one divine that man, being the subject of a divine education here, the roots of his education must surely be carried on in other states of existence hereafter. Painful though attacks on the old beliefs may be, it is confidently claimed by the same writer, that they must issue in being beneficial to the simple and pure Gospel of Christ, that man has a Father in Heaven, who is seeking to make him perfect as He is perfect.

The seeds of Erskine's sowing were to find a rich and fruitful soil in the life and works of George Macdonald. We have been considering chiefly how Erskine's theological ideas affected the schools; but in George Macdonald they found an able advocate, who by his popular novels broadcast them among the people, and gave especially most winning expression to the thought of limitless hope.

Nearly all Erskine's leading ideas come forth in David Elginbrod, Alec Forbes of Howglen, Robert Falconer, for striking and attractive re-enforcement- the Fatherly love of God, the graciousness of Christ's invitation to sinners, the melting power of His grace, the silent watcher in the chamber of conscience, the inner experience of God, and the bright hope for all. Macdonald's deep spiritual instincts reacted strongly against the harshnesses of Calvinism. As an illustration of his advocacy of Erskine's Universalism, a few sentences may be taken from 'David Elginbrod' p.335.

" There is no spiritual victory gained by a verbal conquest; or by any kind of torture, even should the rack employed be the purest logic. Nay more; so long as the wicked themselves remain impenitent, there is mourning in Heaven; and when there is no longer any hope over one last remaining sinner, heaven itself must confess its defeat, heap upon that sinner what plagues you will."

The potent influence of Erskine's radiant faith and personality

personality was also felt in the Scottish Episcopal Church, upon Bishop Alexander Ewing, a leader of that communion who, it is said, for liberality of outlook and charitableness of spirit was head and shoulders above any of his day. It can be affirmed with certainty that Erskine's spirit and beliefs inspired and moulded his theology. Erskine's Letters Vol. 2 and Ewing's Memoirs abundantly attest this. One letter is sufficient to quote. Writing to Erskine in 1861 Ewing makes this extraordinary statement of indebtedness.

" I owe you more, dear Sir, than to any man alive. I owe you belief in God, - in God as my and our true Friend and Father." ( Memoir of Bishop Alexander Ewing D.C.L. p. 327.)

Bishop Ewing was no lover of systems of any kind in religion, and he seems to have completely discarded the traditional formulas, regarding them as so many skeletons amidst the living. " Let us arise" he said to his clergy, " from systems whether of Episcopacy or Presbytery- above all material apparatus. Let us rise to higher things; let us live in that region which makes the face to shine, and where the heart says, 'I have seen the Lord; where we behold His glory, and the Word becomes flesh in the midst of us." (Quoted Edinburgh Review: April 1878. pp. 403-7.)

One of his last expressed wishes was to ~~f~~estify in the College Chapel at Glasgow to the power of a common faith uniting his own Church and the National Church of Scotland.

But this wish was denied him, owing to the interdict of his superior Bishop. Ewing was far ahead of his day and Church in vision. But his dream abides and it was Erskine who gave it birth.

Erskine's Letters have already come under consideration as indicating the development of his theological views; but they claim our attention for the further light they throw upon his profound influence on a wide circle of friends, who were leading thinkers and outstanding religious forces of the time.

Dean Stanley, who also came under the magnetic power of his personality and teaching, bears earnest testimony to Erskine's greatness as a liberal theologian of his day, and to his wonderful gift of friendship. In his *Reminiscences: Erskine's Letters*- Vol. II. p.294. he writes as follows:-

" In all the varying Scottish communions he had those who counted his friendship one of their chief privileges; but not only there but also in England and with Catholic Frenchmen in Normandy, and also in Geneva and America."

The Letters are a treasury of religious faith and comfort to any who read them; but their chief merit for us is- that they not only reveal Erskine in his essential lovingness, but also others who by his love were made to reveal themselves. They show us how his faith inspired the best in men and women and drew forth their love of the highest.

The name of Thomas Carlyle may be taken as a notable example. The friendship between Erskine and Carlyle was of long and enduring standing. Many letters passed between them and Carlyle was frequently a guest at Linlathen. A walk from the mansion house to the garden is pointed out to this day as Carlyle's walk. When Carlyle came to be installed as Lord Rector of Edinburgh University it was with Erskine he stayed

Something very different from the stern moralist and philosopher appears in the letters between them. It is the evangelical note of love, revealing a new and tender grace in the sage. Writing from Chelsea, 23rd. January 1868 to Erskine he says:- "The love of human creatures one to another, where it is true and unchangeable, often strikes me as a strange fact in their poor history, a kind of perpetual Gospel, revealing itself in them; sad, solemn, beautiful, the heart and mother of all that can, in any way ennoble their otherwise mean and contemptible existence in this world."

But the most remarkable letter is one (Chelsea, 12th. Feb. 1869.) in which Carlyle tells of a spiritual experience that came to him, by which the Lord's Prayer lodged in his heart, with a new and benign significance, opening up an infinite meaning.

"Not for perhaps thirty or forty years had I once formally repeated this prayer: nay, I never felt before how intensely the voice of Man's soul it is; the inmost aspiration

of all that is high and pious in poor Human Nature: right worthy to be recommended with an "After this manner pray ye."

Who but the saint of Linlathen could have touched such chords and kindled in Carlyle's heart the more gracious elements of Gospel truth?

The impact of Erskine and his writings upon the great Dr. Thomas Chalmers, in changing and softening his theological and spiritual outlook, is perhaps the most notable of all. If this had stood alone it would have distinguished Erskine as one of the great spiritual forces of the century.

Although they did not see eye to eye on some theological questions, e.g. Chalmers' fear that Erskine's early views of the Divine love carried with it the denial of the Eternity of Future Punishments, there was a strong bond of fellowship between them; and Chalmers from the beginning had profound sympathy with Erskine's gracious views of Christian truth. In the conflict of opinion caused by the Row Movement, Chalmers preserved unbroken silence. He certainly shrank from the speculations of Irving. But his own strong convictions as to the unconditional freeness of the Gospel offer disposed him to judge very mildly what were called the errors of Erskine and Campbell.

An intimate and intelligent friend records the impressions from a conversation one day with Dr. Chalmers on the subject

subject of the 'heresy', " It seems to me that the Gospel had never appeared to Chalmers in any very different light from that in which Mr. Erskine represents it. He regrets that there is any controversy, for he thinks there is little difference." ( Memoirs of Chalmers: Vol. III. p. 245.)

The Journal of Chalmers affords unmistakable evidence of the spiritual direction he received from Erskine. In a letter to Erskine- dated May 1818( Journal: Vol.II.) Dr. Chalmers writes as follows:-

" I cannot tell you how truly grateful I am for all you write and all you say on theological subjects. You have given most useful direction to my own mind, and I have endeavoured in some of my later pulpit demonstrations to press home the lesson of salvation and spiritual health being synonymous with each other. It is truly excellent."

In another letter, dated 26th. June 1825.( Journal: Vol. III. p.81.) Chalmers wrote to a friend about Erskine.

" I have had a visit from Mr. Erskine. The impulse of these visits remains. And this day I have proposed a more distinct and strenuous work of sanctification, and shall allow, if God will, much larger space than before for the employment of daily and direct communion with Himself."

These letters are remarkable as showing Erskine's spiritual power, not only on the mind of Chalmers but also on his inner life.



In the year 1841, Chalmers while continuing to be a staunch Calvinist, relinquished in his theological lectures at the University of Edinburgh the method of treatment which he had previously followed, and recast them on a new plan. These lectures form his Institutes of Theology published after his death.

The confession is made, (Introduction: Vol.I. p.10.) of his disappointment with the method of previous theologians who followed the Confessions and the Catechism, and the need for a fresh presentation. To compare the former with the new method adopted is to mark a very great difference. Synthesis is abandoned for Analysis. It is decidedly better to begin from the objects and facts of experience and conscience, the things that are most palpable and nearest to hand than with the definitions and vast concepts of the Westminster Confession, which he says led to unwarrantable dogmatism.

The subject matter of these lectures is divided into 3 sections: first, the disease for which there is the Gospel remedy; second, the nature of the remedy; third, the extent of the remedy.

In the examination of the first- man's moral nature and the needs and necessities of the human spirit, the point of view strongly resembles that of Erskine, especially the thoughts on conscience. In the second, Christ crucified is central, the great vehicle of a Full and Free Gospel, and Faith thro, which sinners

sinners are justified. And in the third, there is set forth the Universality of the Gospel. Emphasis is laid upon the Gospel for every creature under Heaven. " There are no freezing limitations here- but a largeness and munificence of mercy, boundless as space, free and open as the expanse of the firmament." ( Vol.II. p.404.)

It is not difficult to hear the echo of Erskine's voice and spirit in all this- the new emphasis on grace and the boundless love of God the Father. Chalmers felt that wonderful note, and others thro. him were moved and responded.

The Letters afford abundant evidence that Erskine's voice carried a message far beyond the confines of his own country. To those abroad who regarded Scottish Theology as of a stiff uniform Calvinism, he brought new light and commended something very different. It may be confidently claimed for him, that thro. his translated works and friendships in France and Switzerland, he did much to break down the narrowness of Evangelicalism on the continent, and to strengthen the Gospel appeal to conscience and reason.

The Duchesse de Broglie, the daughter of Madame de Staël was perhaps his most intimate friend, and certainly most distinguished. A long correspondence between them is included in the Letters, revealing a beautiful spirit in the Duchesse to receive Erskine's gracious teaching and his eager-

eagerness to impart it. It was the Duchesse who translated into French his first work.

The famous Swiss theologian, Vinet, was another close friend, drawn to Erskine by common sympathies for the Evangelical truth, and finding much in his liberal theological convictions to strengthen his own. The 'Internal Evidence' came to him as a noble utterance, greatly helping to disperse the darkness gathered round the Gospel, and to set it in its true light. In the following letter he pays a wonderful tribute to Erskine's work:- ( Letters: Vol.I.p.365.)

" Si je ne haïssais par principe ces expressions: 'Je suis d'Apollos et de Céphas,' je me laisserais aller volontiers à dire: Je suis d'Erskine. Il n'enveloppe pas l'Évangélie de ténèbres."

Testimony is also forthcoming that Erskine's changed presentation of Christianity was welcomed in America, and produced something more than a sensation. It left a deep mark. Prof. Porter of Yale College, visiting this country in 1866 sought an interview with Erskine, but was prevented. He sent the following communication instead: ( Letters. Vol.I p.365.)

" I wished to say to you that your little work on the Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion has been in America a work highly esteemed and of potent theological influence. My father, who has been the pastor of a flock for nearly 60 years, once said to me that that book had done more than any

single book of his time to give character to the new phase of Theology."

In England, no less than in Europe and America, Erskine's thoughts were destined to leave their deep and permanent mark. The channel thro. which this was accomplished was one of the most influential thinkers of his time- F.D. Maurice. Maurice was first attracted to Erskine thro. his writings, and by their influence a bond of intimate and enduring friendship was formed. In the published letters between them there is much to show that there was common ground and sympathy in the main theological positions they held. Although Maurice said he did not wish to father on Erskine the development of his own views, nevertheless it was Erskine who inspired and moulded Maurice's beliefs.

Maurice was not slow to acknowledge that Erskine voiced his own deep convictions. Many of the theological beliefs which he developed are all to be found, in germ, in the thoughts which Erskine had uttered- the centrality of love in the Gospel scheme, the Atonement as a glorious message of universal love, a profound and deep sense of the awful reality of sin combined with a belief in the absolute completeness of redemption for all.

The indebtedness of one great thinker to another can hardly ever have received fuller acknowledgment, than Maurice gave to Erskine.

In dedicating his book, "The Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament" 1852. to Erskine he says,- " It is more than 20 years ago since a book of yours brought home to my mind the conviction that no gospel but this can of any use to the world." Again in the Dedicatory letter to the doctrine of Sacrifice, 1854. he thanks Erskine for bringing him to see, " that the death of Christ was the answer, given once in the end of the world to that demand-( has God justified Himself?) that in it God did fully manifest His own character."

When he was a professor at Cambridge, exercising a tremendous influence upon young men with his lectures, he again felt constrained to confess his debt in these words:-

" I do feel very often, when I am trying to tell the young men of the conscience that is in each of them, and who is speaking to it, how much you have taught me about that." Again in a letter from Cambridge- 13th. Jan. 1868 he writes:-

" All you said about faith. It seems to me that all my teaching ought to be affected by it. - - - You gave me what was the quickening of thought and life that had been in me doubtless, but that were not clearly and consciously in me, so that I felt you to be an instrument of the Spirit doing and fulfilling His work." ( Letters: Vol. I. p. 128; Vol. 2. p. 310-12)

This hold of the Gospel, which owed so much to Erskine, was worked out by Maurice into a great practical expression of Christian love, with beneficent results for humanity and also for Theology.

Much more might be added from the works of modern theologians to show the value of Erskine's pioneer work in the shaping and enriching the theological outlook of to day. Principal Tulloch, in his book on "Movements of Religious Thought in the 19th. century" singles out Erskine for special treatment, and pronounces him to be one of the dominant theological forces of the century. His considered judgment is, that modern Christianity has never lost the richer mental tone and broader spirit of love that infused themselves into it, thro. his work and that of a few others. Christianity has shown a larger spirit ever since.

Principal Fairbairn in his "Philosophy of the Christian Religion." (pp.349.) and Dorner in his 'System of Christian Doctrine.' (Vol.I.pp.415.) bear indirect testimony to the solid character of the work Erskine performed for Theology.

Of living expositors of his spirit, if not of his doctrines Oman, Inge, Raven may be cited. Wide as they stand apart in their views Erskine's standpoint is theirs in many respects. In "Vision and Authority" and "Grace and Personality." many of Erskine's germinal thoughts are worked out. In the preface to the latter work Oman says:- "It is my conviction, strengthened by years of war, that the greatest need, even of our needy time, is a religion shining in its own light."

Canon Raven in his work-" Jesus and the Gospel of Love."(pp.408.) advances the view that it was not until the

19th. century that this larger concept of the relation of God to His world, or of religion toward life, began to manifest itself. Theology was quickened by men like Coleridge and Carlyle in philosophy; and quoting his words " in the Churches by a few pioneers like Thomas Erskine of Linlathen - - - who were re-interpreting Christianity in categories unknown <sup>to</sup> sine the third century." (p.409.)

The cumulative witness is very impressive; and we are led to conclude that the contribution of Erskine to Scottish theological thought and life has been immense, and far greater than has ever been allowed to him.

The need today for a re-Statement of the Church's faith, more simple, direct, and in harmony with modern thought, is being greatly felt and canvassed. If it come, it will owe much to Erskine; and it will require to take account of his theological position, in which the essential character of God's Fatherly Love in Christ figured centrally, and religious experience. For he not only called attention to vital truths of Christianity that had been darkened, but also he assumed a standpoint of such importance, that subsequent thinkers in the same field are bound to deal with his position before they can make any real progress in the science of Theology.

## APPRECIATION and CRITICISM.

Erskine made no claim to set forth a complete system of Theology. It was a task for which he was not equipped. He was not a student of Theology in any scientific sense, for large tracts of enquiry were closed to him. He also set aside too lightly the value of tradition. But his cardinal deficiency lay in a one-sidedness, that sprang from his very strength. It can be claimed with every confidence that his great merit was moral and spiritual rather than intellectual. The value of logic in religion and the power of mere argument he himself largely discarded.

Belonging to the order of saints and prophets, rather than to that of profound thinkers, he saw some aspects of truth with the illumination of genius and gave clear and beautiful expression to them; but this frequently to the neglect of other sides equally important and necessary for rational conclusiveness. It is quite certain that he failed completely to see, that his own attempt to rationalise the truth on the basis of his intuitions, at least during his earlier days and writings, was dangerous and also assailable by reason. So, no more than those against whose views he contended, did Erskine realise that any form of words or rational explanations are ever likely to contain the whole truth of God. In later years he rose into a higher region of light.



This defect showed itself in many ways- in an attitude of narrowness and dogmatism: in a tendency to dwell disproportionately on the soul and the world within and to build religion primarily on the convictions and feelings of the religious consciousness; and also to ignore the great objective facts for subjective experiences. In all these directions an over emphasis is clearly discernible, making for lopsidedness in the presentation of his views.

This failure to appreciate the historical development of Christian truth made him sometimes unfair in his judgment of other opinions. The progressiveness which he advocated should have ~~him~~ made him more appreciative of the law of growth by which truth advances, subject to historical conditions and the dominant influences of the time. He never saw Calvinism in this light, and thus failed partially to understand its real significance. He was often led to fasten upon extreme views of it and to miss its social and national strength. The position of the Moderates and Evangelicals- as both standing for something of value in their time and moderation, received less than justice.

The individualism of his views is remarkable in one who saw so clearly the social implications of the Gospel. In his writings and letters there is little reference to passing events and to the stressful problems of the world without. Little is gleaned of the social conditions and larger happenings of men in the community of the nation

and the Church. The wider aspect of Christianity, as a Gospel bearing upon the actual conditions of men's lives and as a regenerative force applicable to the body politic, did not affect Erskine much. He descended into the soul, where he found the one great light shining; and he was absorbed with the individual's salvation and sanctification. Perhaps here he failed to relate his views to the wider context of life and the world.

It is only right to indicate, however, that in his later years though his convictions suffered no radical change, they were softened by a new light of charity. He recognised Christian truth to be a bigger thing than his own or any other system contained or could contain. He saw good in many forms which before had repelled him. He was open to see truth and light on all sides and welcomed it.

What Erskine's writings lacked, in our estimate, was thoroughness and balance; and the subjective tendency was apt to distort the full picture of truth. But these defects lay very close to his strength. There is something more essential than correct doctrine viz- the experience of religion in the heart and conscience, the fundamental convictions which are the spring of all Christian life.

As a teacher of spiritual Christianity Erskine's place is secure among the greatest. He had no interest in Theology as a mere academic study. It must have a living message for to day and present needs. As a record of outworn

controversies it was of no value for the perennial hunger of man's soul.

To change this was the dominant aim of his life, and to bring Theology in every point close to life. The doctrines of Christianity must be seen to harmonise with the highest cravings of the human heart and conscience. In his day, this connection between doctrine and life had been largely lost. True the note of religious experience had been present in the Reformed Theology at the beginning. But it had fallen from its high estate. Christianity in Scotland had become largely an intellectual system, with little appeal to the vital needs of the spirit; and assent to propositions about God had taken the place of vital contact with the Divine. Erskine's own spiritual experience, upon which his Theology was founded had taught him that religion and Theology were in a moribund condition without the inspirational force of a living faith.

There was no disparagement of creeds as such. He resisted with all his soul the idea of a practical Christianity working without revelation. Renan's 'Vie de Jésus' shocked him with its lack of Theology. A doctrinal basis was absolutely necessary for morality and the every day life of man. But the creed must be real and express living needs. Erskine brought his religious experience into his Theology, and in the interest of vital Christianity he insisted that the connection between Theology and religion must be deep and permanent.

To the Christian teacher, expositor, and learner he gave back a Gospel to be proclaimed and received joyfully, and he sent them back to the Bible to find it. Erskine always held the Bible in deepest reverence and to be of prime importance as containing God's supreme self disclosure to men; but this conjoined to the corroborative witness of the Spirit. Neither a Book nor a Church would he allow to be a substitute for the Living Spirit. It was always the Bible more fully understood in the manifested light of new truth, to which he appealed. There must be no surrender of the heart and understanding. In proclaiming the supremacy of conscience he at the same time reduced religion to its essence, that is to say to communion with God. Worship is brought back to spirit and truth.

Many of Erskine's interpretations of Scripture would not satisfy modern scholarship. He did approach it with a devout spirit, an acute intellect, and furnished with knowledge; but many of his views and conclusions are of doubtful value and may be set aside as defective. Yet by his grasp of the whole and his perpetual researches into Holy Writ, he gave a real impetus to Biblical Theology. The critical study of the Bible was only then in its infancy; and there is no doubt that he set many scholars to explore its truths with a fuller equipment and a new spirit. The enrichment that has come to faith, thro. this expansiveness, is an indirect benefit from

Erskine. Even where his arguments fail to convince there is always light in them; and as was truly written by Principal Tulloch,- "they lifted the soul to Divine Mystery even when they failed to give meaning to it."

The great and peculiar glory of Erskine was the power of his spiritual vision, by which he saw to the heart of the Gospel, and laid it afresh upon the conscience of the Church to set it forth in such a way, that men would be led to know, trust, and obey the God whose Holy Love had been disclosed in Christ. In all his writings, letters, and intimate meetings with his fellowmen, the old doctrines came forth out of the dust of the ages, revalued and filled with spiritual life. By his profound insight he got at the heart of the truth that lay behind dogma, and rediscovered the primal truth of Christianity, giving it a central position for Theology and life, from which it can never be dethroned.

Sometimes his writing is subtle and metaphysical; but at heart his message is simple and direct, such as a child could understand, and very close to Christ. The divine manifestation which he loved is that of the Good Shepherd and the father of the prodigal. These two pictures were engraven in his heart. They are recurrent in many of his writings. This Love which seeks until it finds was for Jesus the Love of God; it was also so for his disciple.

Specially valuable for his time and for us was

the prominence Erskine gave to faith. Like St. Paul he set faith in a central place, and he would have endorsed Luther's words in his Larger Catechism- " To have God is nothing else than to trust, and to believe in Him with all the heart. These two, faith and God, belong together."

To Erskine the Christian life was a new life- a life made possible thro. Christ and otherwise impossible. It was a new divine principle given to life by God's Son, which like natural life had its own laws and stages of development. It could never be truthfully described as man's quest for the truth; it was a divine gift which had also to become our own insight. Orthodoxy had gone far wrong in identifying it with a human creed; for it was participation in a divine life. Such was faith to Erskine, something far more than feeling: it was trust, affection, fellowship, surrender, and consecration.

By releasing these great truths from their narrow legal forms and bringing them again into the Christian consciousness and experience, Erskine gave a fresh impulse to theological thought, and re-vitalised the religious life of man. There is hardly a branch of Theology which has not received a quickening. Thro. his writings, and more by his spirit and personality he has helped much to bring health, liberation, and sweetening into British Theology.

He did a great service to correct the abuses and excesses of Calvinism in his day, which tended to obscure the Christian conception of God and to darken unduly the life

and destiny of men. Much more however was his achievement. He also pointed the way to something better and higher. He directed the Calvinistic Theology towards a deeper reality viz- a living faith, helpful and real for life and character, by being understood, loved, and applied.

No less significant is the help which Erskine gave to Theology, in conceiving the supreme reality, <sup>of God</sup> with which it has to deal, more concretely. He studied experience and sought to discover which elements in it had the greatest permanence and worth. He showed that the qualities which faith finds central in God should be and are those which are most needed for an explanation of the eternal facts of life. He removed some of the difficulties that stood in the way of a more adequate and scientific expression of Christian faith.

The problems with which Theology tended most to deal in Erskine's day have lost their meaning for many in the modern world. The Christian faith is being challenged by secularism and irreligion to day; and many people in the Churches are perplexed. Yet the vital problems of life, which are the province of Theology, press upon men with unabated insistence. Amid the darkness that besets our human life, men are seeking for light and guidance, which is not to be found in themselves.

Can the Church confidently give it? We believe it can, if it relies on the evangelical and catholic message, which Erskine devoted his life to re-inforce viz:-

viz:- Divine Revelation, Divine Grace, and the ever working power of the Holy Spirit. Relying upon these great truths, the Church has a Gospel for this and every age.

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APPENDIX.

## i. See p. 12

This first publication of Erskine created a tremendous sensation. It ran into 9 editions in the course of a few years. In 1822 it was translated into French and three years later into German. Vinet, the great Protestant theologian found it deeply arresting and most felicitously expressed, in new and interesting points of view. Newman though out of sympathy with its teaching, felt that its challenge could not be set aside, and sought to answer it. There is also evidence that it made a powerful disturbance in America. See letter from Prof. Porter of Yale in Section vi.

## ii. See p. 46.

Erskine was present in the General Assembly on the night that Campbell was deposed for heresy- a painful spectator of the scene. It is recorded that the Principal Clerk was guilty of a lapsus linguae. He declared, meaning exactly the opposite, " that these doctrines of Mr. Campbell would remain and flourish after the Church of Scotland had perished and was forgotten! Whereupon Erskine turning to those behind him whispered the well known verse in St. John's gospel, " This spake he, not of himself, but being High Priest that year, he prophesied."

This is mentioned by Dr. Butler, Cambridge as " one of

the very finest of all impromptu repartees of a serious kind." ( Quoted by The Rev. Adam Fergusson D.D. in Sons of the Manse, p. 344.) More than once Erskine's words proved prophetic.

iii. See p. 48

These letters are profoundly interesting, not only as throwing some light on a still obscure passage in the religious history of our country, but also as throwing a clear light on many features in Erskine's character.

The Row disturbance was a very great and real one in Scottish theology. People from all parts of England, Scotland, Ireland, came to the houses, in which the manifestations were to be seen. Erskine joined them; staying no less than 6 weeks in the house of the Macdonalds, witnessing the manifestations, and taking part in the daily prayer meetings.

Principal Story visited Mary Campbell and avowed in a letter to Dr. Chalmers, who eagerly sought information, that she was truly possessed with prophetic gifts and powers. Two years later, along with Erskine, he saw reason to think differently. ( Letters of Erskine, Vol. I. p. 180.)

The Edinburgh Review had several long and searching articles on the subject- " Pretended miracles, Irving, Scott, and Erskine". ( June- 1831.) denouncing it as dangerous to the religious life of the country. One of its effects was the tragedy that befell the saintly Irving, and the infection

of his great London congregation, which became divided. ( Letters: p.184.) " Slowly out of that strange confusion which disturbed at first the worship of the Church in Regent Square, at command of those strange voices before and beneath which the grand humble heroic spirit of Edward Irving bowed and was broken, the form and order of the Holy Catholic Apostolic Church arose."

iv. See p. 57.

Re. the universal extent of God's Fatherhood, two views are represented in the N.T. The one restricts it to believers, on the ground of the Pauline texts which are taken to imply a limited Fatherhood, and that our Lord nowhere speaks of God as the Father of all. Only one phrase in the N.T. Eph. iv.,6. it is pointed out, explicitly suggests the universal Fatherhood. This was the view of the traditional theology.

Erskine held the other view. He based it on our Lord's whole emphasis upon Fatherhood. This fact is of immense significance, and cannot be easily overthrown by negative evidence. But chiefly, he held that the relation of Father and child is a natural one and cannot be expressed by any idea of contract. It points to the fact, that all who are in existence are connected to God as a child to its earthly father. By the gift of existence, the child is in that filial relation. It does not begin to be in; it can only begin to realise the meaning and the powers and obligations which the relationship

brings. The metaphor of adoption has therefore an element of legal fiction in it, in so far as the proceeding must be legal only. These views are strongly put by Canon Quick in his book-'the Christian Sacraments' pp. 166 and they are substantially in accord with Erskines.

v. See p. 63

Bearing upon this, the Expositor, ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll L.L.D., Sixth series, Vol. III. contains illuminating remarks. It especially serves to show the benign influence of Erskine's thoughts upon the ordinary religious God-fearing man and woman of his day.

The writer, who entered Cambridge in 1872, says:-  
 " My mother was the paramount influence in my life. Beside a few old books, she loved, as did also our father, the earlier works of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, and the Unconditional Freeness above the rest. This essay was out of print then, and she would take much trouble to find the second hand copies and present them to her friends. Erskine had brought her accessions of light, and she was faithful to him all her days.

Referring further on in the article to the change in the religious outlook in the University of Cambridge in 1872, he uses this illustration:- " One can see it in comparing such a book as "the Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel" with " Ecce Homo". The gap is so great; it seems useless to begin on details; in the first, Erskines- the standpoint is from

God and His will, and man with his feelings and misguided endeavours is dismissed with scant courtesy. While in Ecce Homo, the standpoint is from man, and it is God who is at the far distance."

vi. See p. 65.

Erschine held strong views on Election. Every one is under election, for God's grace has visited every human being whereby there is in the heart a spiritual light or a witness for God, striving in them against sin. This is our election, he says, and it is universal. But it is only potential and cannot become real till man has connected himself with God's predestinating purpose. If they yield to it, they are led further and further into the life of God the Father.

The elect are therefore all who respond to the drawing of God; and by cultivating faith, virtue, obedience, knowledge, and diligence, they are ever in the condition of making their election sure. Unconditional election is condemned. No one becomes personally elect except by his personally receiving Christ into his heart. But by the turning of the heart thro. the inward witness, men are prepared to receive and welcome Jesus, presented to them in the gospels; and walking with Him and following Him, they are brought into ever fuller and richer experience of the Father and His loving and gracious purposes.

vii. See p. 73

vii. See p. 73

In "Tracts for the Times" No. 73. Vol. III. Newman strongly criticises Erskine's use of the word 'Manifestation' for the Gospel revelation. It is the symbol of rationalism, he says; but the Catholic conception is that of Mystery.

Erskine would not have denied that there is mystery unfathomable in the Divine Being, and in His ways and dealings with men. But he was surely right in holding that God had manifested Himself supremely in Christ; and that it was not presumption in the human mind, reverently to seek out the meaning, that we may believe it intelligently and profitably.

It is further objected to Erskine's view, that the reasonableness of a Revelation depends on its direct bearing upon life and character, and its fitness to promote these. Again there is obscurantism and unreality in the charge. For surely God's purpose, in all revealed truth, must be to conform the will and character of man to His own Holy and Perfect Will and Character.

Newman in his strictures, at least fully admits that Erskine gave the supreme place to the Atonement, as being the corner stone of Christianity. But when Erskine declares that the doctrine has had to encounter the misapprehension of the intellect and the pride of the heart, which are both true, he calls it a presumptuous system, opposed to catholic doctrine, teaching nothing but a manifestation. Again it is the note of

Church authority and submission that is foremost in the criticism. But Erskine saw in the Cross, whatever mystery it contained, the luminous heart of God made plain for sinful men.

viii. See p. 81.

"The just shall live by faith." Rom. I: 17.

Erskine tries to make Habakkuk's meaning fit in with Pauls. But it must be admitted that Habakkuk used faith to mean fidelity, not trust or confidence. However, though Erskine's interpretation of the passage is deficient, he has got a right hold of St. Paul's thoughts on faith (much truer than those who have built certain systems on it) as an entire confidence in God, and a trusting ourselves to Him in a relationship of grace. This confidence makes a man righteous, for it subdues his own will to the will of God and makes him of one mind with God.

ix. See p. 86.

Dr. James Walker in his work on "Scottish Theology and Theologians" 1872. calls attention to the fact that the Marrow men were in truth, extreme particular redemptionists. They more thoroughly identified Christ and His elect than the theologians who preceded them. The Marrow theology was more tender, however, in saying less about the reprobates. They

also entered into the missionary spirit of the Bible- first among our divines. And Boston saw at length, that the Gospel offer was for all.

x. See p. 89.

The criticisms of Dr. Andrew Thomson in his review of the Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel, (Edinburgh Christian Instructor: Vol. 27. 1828. pp.410.) while exposing some lesser inconsistencies in Erskine's thoughts, do not disturb his vital message.

Erskine intuitively saw to the heart of the Gospel and had glimpses of the Divine love, which the more systematic mind of Thomson entirely lacked. The Calvinistic views represented in this review, fail completely in doing justice to the nobler conceptions of the New Testament, which Erskine brought to light and set in the forefront of his teaching.

Heaven and hell are still materialistic conceptions and are offered largely as rewards to faith and escape from punishment. Legal notions of pardon and salvation obscure the gracious personal relationship of God and man, and hinder its working in a moral way. The Atonement is regarded as a technical system of beliefs, restricted in its operation, rather than as a message of universal love. And at the back of the whole system, in experience, lurks the grim and fatalistic conception of a God of partiality, whose good purposes' bear



only on a definite number of human beings', and who acts by a method of irresistible decrees. ( p.426.)

xi. See p. 92

The old Theology of Scotland was called a Covenant theology. It started with the conception of the necessity of satisfaction to the Divine justice. There were two Covenants. The first was entered into between God and Adam, and was called a covenant of works. It broke down thro. disobedience and sin. The second entered into between God the Father and God the Son was called a covenant of grace.

The chief ideas that run thro. this scheme are expressed by the words- covenant meaning a bargain, law, ransom, purchase etc. Christ offered a real satisfaction to the justice of God as the substitute of His own elect people. He obeyed in their room and stead. By His obedience unto death, He acquired for them, under His covenant with the Father, law rights to Eternal life. This scheme sought to guard the Holiness and Majesty of God against any cheapening of His salvation and was a protest against Arminianism. But it is quaint and artificial to us to day.

xii. See p. 97

Erskine's ideas of the Church are set forth in the Letters, Vol. I. pp.393. Though taking a catholic and comprehensive view of the Holy Spirit's operations, he believed

that in the Church a special and deeper work of the Spirit was performed, than in the world. Of the supreme value of the Church's fellowship in worship and service, he speaks in glowing terms. " I feel the sin and misery of Individuality, and I have received the truth of Christ as the gift of the one heart of God to the whole human race, which would bless men by uniting them all in God." (Letters: Vol.i. p. 397. )

The unity of the Body of Christ, thro. the One Spirit, was ever a deeply felt need in Erskine's heart. But he set little store by mere outward organisation or uniformity- " the putting together of things without the Spirit." He eschewed any sacerdotal view of the Church. " I cannot admit the ordinance of a teacher in the Church when God is not manifested in him, when I do not consciously meet God in him teaching me." ( p. 397.) In another place he says:- " He whose heart is filled most with the Shepherd's love and authority will be recognised as the one to whom Jesus says, " Feed my sheep; feed my lambs." (p395.)

Here, as in all his teaching, it is the Spirit and not the form or office in itself that matters- the inner life of the soul in God in which religion consists. If there were two men, he declares, who knew God or who had God's light in them, they would be the Church of the Living God on earth, joined by the One Spirit to the Church above.

xiii. See p. 108.

It has been thought a strange thing that Erskine ceased to give his views to the world, rather abruptly, at a comparatively early period of his life. There had been a continuous flow of chaste and beautiful thoughts in books in the third decade and into the fourth of the century: but silence fell for over 30 years till his last unfinished thoughts were published after his death.

He himself complained that he had outgrown many of his earlier works; but that does not seem to have been borne out by the testimony of his most intimate friends. In the earlier years he took every opportunity to disseminate his convictions by writing, speaking, and addressing meetings. This suddenly ceased. It may have been that he discerned that he could be more useful thro. conversation and intimate contacts. Or quite possibly he felt that he had published his message to the world and had said all he had to say in his early books.

Growth undoubtedly there was, and especially in the broader and richer spirit discernible in the second book of his Letters. But he had quite early made up his mind on most of the great problems of religion. The final issue of the love of God completely engaged the closing years of his life.

xiv. See p. 135.

When in the year 1853 Maurice was suspended from his chair in King's College, London, for denying the unending

duration of future punishment, Erskine wrote to his friend, Lord Rutherford a strong protest, in which he does not measure words to express his pain at such narrowness. " I congratulate him on being a martyr in such a cause, but I should be sorry if at this day the Church of England as a body confirms such a sentence. If spiritual perfection consists in the love of God, and of men, and of all righteousness, it is not easy to see how such a doctrine as the eternity of punishment can lead to it. Men cannot be frightened into love; and they cannot easily realise God as a God of love, if such a doctrine be believed." ( Letters:Vol II. p. 81.)

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